Dharma: Understanding the Teachings of the Buddha and Their Practical Application in Daily Life

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been submitted
as an exercise for a degree at any other institution,
and that it is entirely my own work.

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Abstract

This thesis explores the concept of **Dharma** within the spiritual and philosophical doctrines conveyed by the Buddha and its relevance to contemporary everyday life. Dharma is both a way of thinking and a helpful guide for how to live wisely and do what's right and follow ethical life, mindfulness, and personal transformation. The heart of the Dharma lies in the Buddha's core insights—especially the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, and other vital teachings that guide one toward awakening. This research makes ancient wisdom relevance to modern challenges, demonstrating that Dharma remains a timeless and universal path toward a more harmonious and meaningful existence. This is done by examining historical interpretations, scriptural sources, and modern adaptations. This study highlights how individuals can integrate Buddhist teachings into real-world applications through textual analysis. Dharma, often understood as 'the way' or 'the path,' has profound practical applications in daily life; such as: **Mindfulness in Daily Activities, Ethical Living, Interpersonal Relationships, and Personal Growth** and so on. More real-life applications are covered in chapter 4 and 5: Conclusion—Summary of Findings.

The Buddha may be regarded as one of history's most devoted missionaries. For forty-five years, he journeyed from place to place, sharing his teachings with both ordinary people and the educated elite. Until his final moments, he dedicated himself fully to the service of humanity, guiding others through both his actions and his words. His eminent disciples followed his example, traveling even to far-off lands without any possessions, spreading the Dharma selflessly and without expecting anything in return.

"Strive on with diligence" were the Buddha's final words. In Buddhism, liberation and inner purification cannot be attained without one's own effort. Therefore, practices such as

petitionary or intercessory prayers are not encouraged. Instead, meditation is emphasized as the path to self-mastery, inner cleansing, and enlightenment. Both meditation and compassionate service are central elements of Buddhist doctrine.

The Buddha's first teaching was, "Do no evil," which means don't harm yourself or others. Next, he said, "Do good," encouraging people to help themselves and others. His most important message was, "Purify your mind." The mind can either help us or hurt us. If we train it through moral behavior, focus, and understanding, we can free ourselves from desire, anger, and ignorance.

The spiritual principles and truths taught by the Buddha maintain the unchanged principles of justice and truth; for more than twenty-five centuries the Dharma teachings have enlightened humanity and released all bondages, bringing peace and happiness to those following the Great Middle Way.

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To conclude, with deep respect, I dedicate this thesis to my cherished parents and to all my well-wishing teachers who have departed this life. May they be embraced by the supreme peace of Nibbāṇa.

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

The Buddha's teachings, called the Dharma, help us understand life and how to reach spiritual freedom. These teachings comprise important ideas like the Four Noble Truths, which explain that suffering exists and show how to end it, and the Eightfold Path, which gives practical steps for living a better and more mindful life, the Dharma serves as a timeless guide to human well-being. Despite originating over 2,500 years ago in ancient India, Buddhist philosophy continues to inspire seekers across different cultures and belief systems, proving its universal relevance in addressing the fundamental challenges of life.

The application of Dharma is often associated with monastic traditions, deep meditation, and renunciation. However, its principles are equally valuable for lay practitioners, influencing everyday experiences such as relationships, career choices, emotional regulation, and personal development. In today's fast-paced world, where stress, uncertainty, and material distractions often lead to anxiety and dissatisfaction, the Buddha' teachings offer a path to cultivate **inner peace, ethical awareness, and resilience**. The practice of **mindfulness (sati)**, for example, has gained widespread recognition in psychology and wellness circles, demonstrating its effectiveness in reducing stress, improving emotional intelligence, and fostering a greater sense of presence in daily life. Additionally, Buddhist ethical guidances, such as right speech, right livelihood, and right action, provide a moral compass for navigating interpersonal and professional challenges with integrity and compassion.

1.2 Research Questions

This thesis aims to explore the core of the Buddha's teachings and their **practical application in contemporary life**. It seeks to answer fundamental questions, including:

- **How can individuals apply the Dharma in everyday decision-making?**
- **How does mindfulness enhance emotional intelligence and mental clarity?**
- **What role does Buddhist ethics play in fostering compassionate communication and ethical leadership?**

To address these questions, this study will examine **classical Buddhist texts**, such as the *Dhammapada* and the *Sutta Pitaka*, alongside modern interpretations and scientific research on mindfulness and ethical living. Furthermore, real-life case studies of individuals and communities who integrate Buddhist principles into their daily routines will be explored, demonstrating the transformative power of these teachings.

By bridging the gap between ancient wisdom and contemporary challenges, this research will illustrate that the Dharma isn't just a set of ideas, but something to live by and apply in everyday life, one that can guide individuals toward greater fulfillment, self-awareness, and ethical responsibility. In doing so, this study highlights the enduring significance of the Buddha's teachings as a pathway to personal growth, transformation, and collective harmony in an increasingly complex world. This thesis delves into the foundational principles of Dharma and investigates their practical applications in daily life.

1.3 Objectives

The primary objectives of this study are:

1. To elucidate the core Buddha's teachings.
2. To explore the contemporary relevance of these teachings.
3. To provide practical strategies for integrating Dharma into daily life.

1.4 Significance of this project

We will present the connection between the Four Noble Truths and Eightfold Path and their application to daily through specific examples.

1.5 Methodology

This research employs a literary analysis, drawing from primary Buddhist texts such as the Pali Canon and secondary sources, including commentaries and modern interpretations focusing on. Three case studies from 'Case Studies in Spiritual Care', edited by George Fitchett and Steve Nolan, and from my life experience in the prison of the Vietnamese communist when they invaded the south of Vietnam took over the Saigon city, will serve as examples to illustrate the practical applications of these teachings.

Chapter 2: The Core Teachings of the Buddha

2.1 The Four Noble Truths

In this project, the teachings of the Buddha are centered on his main teaching of the Four Noble Truths. Chapter 2 explores the connection between the Four Noble Truths and the Noble Eightfold Path. As these two elements form the foundation of Buddhist philosophy, the author aims to emphasize their particular relevance and significance to the objectives of this study. The Four Noble Truths, in particular, serve as the cornerstone of the Buddhist philosophical and practical instruction, as outlined below:

Dukkha: There is suffering and unsatisfaction in life.

Samudaya: The cause of suffering rooted in craving and attachment.

Nirodha: The end of pain is possible by removing craving.

Magga: The Eightfold Path provides a practical framework for overcoming suffering.

2.2 The Eightfold Path

The Noble Eightfold Path, as taught by the Buddha, serves as a complete framework for ethical conduct, mental discipline, and spiritual progress. It is traditionally grouped into three core categories:

1. **Wisdom (Prajna):** Right view, the correct understanding of reality, particularly insight into the Four Noble Truths—recognizing the nature of suffering, its cause, its cessation, and the path leading to its end. Right intention, the cultivation of wholesome thoughts by letting go of desires driven by greed, ill-will, and cruelty, and instead fostering renunciation, goodwill, and harmlessness.

2. **Ethical Conduct (Sila):** Right Speech: Avoiding verbal wrongdoing like lying, crude speech, and gossip. Right Action: Avoiding physical wrongdoing like murder, stealing, and sexual misconduct. Right Livelihood: keeping away from dealings that damage others, like selling weapons, slaves, and misconduct.

3 **Mental Discipline (Samadhi):** Right Effort: Leaving bad mindset and cultivating good attitudes. Right Mindfulness, thoughts: recognize your body, feelings, thoughts. Right Concentration: Developing single-mindedness.

The Eightfold Path is a transformative process aimed at unlearning conditioned patterns that veil our true nature. According to the Buddha, the path to the end of suffering involves ethical living, meditative discipline, and the training of wisdom and compassion. As one of the central frameworks of Buddhist teachings, the Eightfold Path provides practical steps toward liberation. In early Buddhism, it is presented as the path leading to Arhatship—a state of individual liberation. In later Buddhist traditions, it is understood as a means to overcome ignorance, end suffering, and freedom from the cycle of rebirth (saṃsāra).

The reason why we divide the Eightfold Path into three categories, Wisdom (prajna), Ethical Conduct (sila), and Mental Discipline (samadhi), because these divisions represent the essential aspects of spiritual development, leading to freedom from suffering (dukkha). Each category plays a crucial role in achieving enlightenment by addressing different aspects of human experience.

2.3 Wisdom (Prajna - Insight)

- Right View, gaining a deep understanding of the Four Noble Truths and perceiving reality in its true, natural form.
- Right Intention, developing wholesome mental attitudes based on letting go, kindness, and non-violence.

Why this category?

Wisdom is essential because it provides the true understanding and stimulation for the spiritual path. Without proper knowledge and intention, ethical behavior and meditation lack the right direction.

2.4 Ethical Conduct (Sila - Morality)

- Right Speech, using words that are honest, compassionate, and purposeful.
- Right Action, behaving in a morally upright way by avoiding harm to others.
- Right Livelihood, having a profession or means of income that is ethical and does not bring harm to oneself or others.

Why this category?

Ethical conduct helps purify actions, speech, and livelihood, creating the foundation for a peaceful and harmonious life. A mind burdened by unethical behavior cannot make progress in meditation or wisdom.

2.5 Mental Discipline (Samadhi - Concentration)

- Right effort: Making a consistent effort to let go of negative states of mind and to foster positive, wholesome qualities.

- Right Mindfulness: Maintaining clear awareness of the body, emotions, thoughts, and mental patterns in the presen.
- Right Concentration: Engaging in focused meditation that leads to deep mental stillness and clarity.

Why this category?

Mental discipline refines the mind, making it stable and focused. Without concentration and mindfulness, wisdom remains theoretical, and ethical conduct lacks depth.

2.6 Interconnection of the Three Categories:

- Wisdom guides ethical conduct, ensuring it is based on right understanding.
- Ethical conduct supports mental discipline, preventing distractions from unwholesome actions.
- Mental discipline deepens wisdom, allowing insight into natural reality.

Together, these three aspects create a complete and balanced path toward enlightenment. Now, we will start to look deep into the core teachings of Buddhism.

After attaining full enlightenment, the Buddha gave his first sermon around two months later, on the full moon day of Asalha (July), to five ascetic companions—Aññāta Koṇḍañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma, and Assaji—who had previously practiced with him. This landmark teaching, known as *The Setting in Motion of the Wheel of Dharma* (*Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta*), introduced the core doctrine of the Four Noble Truths, which form the essence of Buddhism.

The term **"Dhammacakka"** can be translated as **"the Wheel of Truth," "the Realm of Righteousness,"** or **"the Kingdom of Reality."** In this context, **"truth"** refers to that which

genuinely exists—an unchanging, undeniable reality. Its Sanskrit counterpart, **Satya**, also signifies an absolute or irrefutable fact. In Buddhism, there are four such essential truths that relate to the nature of human existence. These are known as the **Four Noble Truths,** which form the very core of the Buddha's teachings. He first revealed them in his initial discourse to his former companions, the five ascetics.

In this first sermon[1], the Four Noble Truths are presented concisely, as preserved in the original texts. However, throughout the early Buddhist scriptures, these truths are revisited repeatedly, explained in greater depth and from various perspectives. Notable examples include the **Saccavibhanga Sutta**, the **Sammaditthi Sutta**, and the **Mahāhatthipadopama Sutta**, where the Four Noble Truths are elaborated.

According to the author, Walpola Rahula, the Four Noble Truths are:

1. Dukkha
2. Samudaya, the cause of suffering.
3. Nirodha, the ending of suffering.
4. Magga, the path how to end of suffering.

2.7 The First Noble Truth: Dukkha

The **First Noble Truth (Dukkha-ariyasacca)** is commonly translated by most scholars as "The Noble Truth of Suffering," and is often taken to suggest that Buddhism views life solely as suffering and misery. However the author finds both the translation and interpretation inadequate and misleading. Such a simplified rendering, along with a shallow understanding of its meaning, has caused many to mistakenly label Buddhism as a pessimistic philosophy.

[1] Dharmamacakkappavattana-sutta 'setting in motion the wheel of Truth' Mhvg (Alutgama, 1922), p. 9 ff

To begin with, Buddhism cannot be accurately labeled as either pessimistic or optimistic. Rather, it is best described as **realistic**, as it offers a clear and objective perspective on life and the world. Buddhism does not mislead one with comforting illusions, nor does it instill fear through imagined sins or threats. Instead, it presents things as they truly are—honestly and without distortion—helping individuals understand both themselves and their surroundings. Most importantly, it provides a practical path toward genuine freedom, inner peace, calmness, and lasting happiness.

Just like physicians, some people may overstate the seriousness of an illness and lose all hope, while others may dismiss the illness entirely, falsely assuring the patient that no treatment is needed. On one hand, the former could be labeled pessimistic and on the other hand, the latter overly optimistic—yet both approaches are equally harmful. The truly effective doctor, however, accurately diagnoses the symptoms, understands the root causes and nature of the illness, recognizes that it is treatable, and applies the appropriate remedy, ultimately healing the patient. The Buddha is comparable to this third type of physician—a wise and compassionate healer of the world's suffering, known as the **Bhisakka** or **Bhaisajya-guru**, the supreme doctor of the human condition.

The term *dukkha* (Pali), or *duḥkha* (Sanskrit), is translated as "suffering," "pain," "sorrow," or "misery," and is generally seen as the opposite of *sukha*, which conveys meanings such as "happiness," "ease," or "well-being." However, within the context of the **First Noble Truth**, *dukkha* encompasses a much deeper and more nuanced philosophical significance. While it includes the conventional understanding of suffering, it also extends to broader existential concepts such as **imperfection**, **impermanence** (*anicca*), **emptiness**, and **non-self** (*anattā*). This

wider interpretation reflects the Buddha's profound understanding of the human condition. Given its layered and complex meaning, *dukkha* resists accurate translation into a single English word. As a result, many scholars advocate leaving the term untranslated to avoid reducing its conceptual depth and misrepresenting the core of Buddhist philosophy.

When the Buddha speaks of suffering (*dukkha*), he is not denying the existence of happiness in life. On the contrary, he acknowledges a wide range of both material and spiritual forms of happiness available to laypeople and monastics alike. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*—one of the five principal Pali collections of the Buddha's discourses—various types of happiness are listed: the happiness of family life and of renunciation, sensual pleasure and renunciation, attachment and detachment, bodily and mental joy, among others. However, even these forms of happiness are encompassed within the concept of *dukkha*.

This includes even the refined meditative absorptions (*jhānas*) achieved through advanced concentration practices—states entirely free from conventional suffering and often regarded as pure, untainted bliss. Some meditative attainments transcend both pleasant (*sukha*) and unpleasant (*dukkha*) sensations, characterized solely by equanimity and mindfulness. Yet, the Buddha still classifies these elevated states as *dukkha*. In a discourse from the *Majjhima Nikāya*, after extolling the spiritual joy of the *jhānas*, the Buddha notes that they are "impermanent, *dukkha*, and subject to change." Here, *dukkha* does not signify suffering as we understand it in the ordinary sense but rather reflects the underlying Buddhist principle that **whatever is impermanent is inherently unsatisfactory**—and thus, *dukkha*.

The Buddha approached life with realism and objectivity. Concerning sense pleasures and worldly experiences, he taught that one should understand three key aspects: (1) **enjoyment or**

gratification (*assāda*), (2) **the danger or unsatisfactoriness** (*ādīnava*), and (3) **the escape or liberation** (*nissaraṇa*)[2]. For example, when we encounter someone attractive or charming, we naturally feel drawn to them, enjoy their presence, and derive pleasure from repeated interactions. This response represents *assāda*, or the allure of the experience—something that is undeniably real and felt. However, such enjoyment is fleeting; the person and the pleasure they evoke are impermanent. When circumstances shift—perhaps we can no longer see or be with them—we feel sorrow, frustration, or even act irrationally. This represents the negative or dangerous aspect (*ādīnava*), highlighting the suffering that arises from clinging to impermanent pleasures. On the other hand, if one remains detached and does not form possessive attachments, then true freedom or **liberation** (*nissaraṇa*) is achieved. These three insights—gratification, danger, and release—apply universally to all experiences of worldly pleasure and are essential t developing wisdom and inner peace.

It is a question of beyond pessimism and optimism, and the whole scenario that we have to take into account of pleasures of life as well as of its sufferings and unhappiness. It is also of freedom from them, in order to understand life completely and objectively. Only then it is true emancipation possible. Concerning this problem the Buddha says:

"O bhikkhus, if any recluses or brahmanas do not understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense-pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation, then it is not possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense-pleasures completely, or that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, or that the person following their instruction will completely understand the

[2] Majjhima-nikaya I (PTS), p. 85ff.

desire for sense-pleasures. But, O bhikkhus, if any recluses or brahmanas understand objectively in this way that the enjoyment of sense-pleasures is enjoyment, that their unsatisfactoriness is unsatisfactoriness, that liberation from them is liberation , then it is possible that they themselves will certainly understand the desire for sense-pleasures completely, and that they will be able to instruct another person to that end, and that the person following their instruction will completely understand the desire for sense-pleasures."[3]

The concept of *dukkha* can be understood in three dimensions: (1) Ordinary suffering, (2) Suffering due to change, and (3) Suffering arising from conditioned states.[4]

The first type (1), dukkha-dukkha, refers to the most obvious and universally recognized forms of suffering. This includes the pain associated with birth, aging, illness, and death, as well as emotional anguish caused by being with what is unpleasant or being separated from what is pleasant. It also encompasses the frustration of unfulfilled desires, grief, sorrow, and psychological distress. These forms of discomfort are what people typically identify as suffering and are included under the category of ordinary suffering.

Pleasurable feelings and favorable life circumstances are inherently impermanent—they do not last indefinitely. Over time, they inevitably change or come to an end. When such enjoyable experiences fade or are lost, a sense of deprivation or disappointment arises. This emotional discomfort, caused by the loss of what was once pleasing, gives rise to suffering. This suffering is caused by the impermanence of pleasurable conditions, is categorized as *dukkha* in the form of suffering due to change (*vipariṇāma-dukkha*).

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[3] Majjhima-nikaya I (PTS), p. 87.
[4] Vissuddhimagga (PTS), p. 499.

The first two types of suffering are relatively easy to comprehend, and few would dispute their validity. This dimension of the First Noble Truth is more widely recognized, likely because it is more straightforward and commonly experienced in everyday life.

However, the third type of *dukkha*, known as suffering due to conditioned states (*saṅkhāra-dukkha*), represents the most profound and philosophical dimension of the First Noble Truth. Understanding this aspect needs deeper reflection and analysis of what we typically regard as the 'self,' the 'individual,' or the notion of 'I,' along with attachments such as 'this is mine' and 'that is yours.'

In Buddhist philosophy, what we commonly perceive as a 'self,' an 'individual,' or 'I' is, in reality, a collection of constantly changing physical and mental processes. These are categorized into five groups or aggregates (*pañcakkhandha*). The Buddha taught that, in brief, these five aggregates that we cling to are themselves *dukkha*.[5] In another instance, he clearly defines *dukkha* as the five aggregates of attachment, stating: "Monks, what is *dukkha*? It is the five aggregates of clinging."[6]

It is important to recognize that *dukkha* and the five aggregates are not two separate entities; rather, the aggregates themselves being impermanence constitute *dukkha*. This concept becomes clearer as we examine the nature of these five aggregates that make up what we mistakenly refer to as a 'self.' So, what exactly are these five aggregates?

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[5] Samkhittena pancupadanakkhamdha (PTS), p. 421 (PTS=Pali Text Society of London)
[6] Samyutta-nikaya III (PTS), p. 158.

2.8 The Five Aggregates

The first aggregate, known as the Aggregate of Matter (Rūpakkhandha), pertains to the physical aspect of existence. It includes the Four Great Elements[7], solidity, fluidity, heat, and motion, as well as the material forms that arise from them. These derived forms consist of the internal sense organs (the eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body) and their corresponding external sense objects (such as sights, sounds, smells, tastes, and tangible things). In addition, it also covers certain mental representations or conceptual forms that are classified as mental objects (dhammāyatana)[8].

Thus, the entire material world, whether internal (like the body) or external, is embraced by this aggregate. Importantly, all these material forms are in a constant state of flux. For instance, the human body undergoes continuous transformation from childhood to old age. Clinging to transient aspects such as youth or physical beauty inevitably leads to suffering, as these conditions are impermanent.

The second aggregate is the Aggregate of Feelings or Sensations (Vedanakkhandha). It includes all types of feelings we experience, pleasant (which tend to create attachment), unpleasant (which often lead to aversion), and neutral (which are usually overlooked but still part of our experience). These feelings arise from the interaction between our physical and mental faculties and the external world. There are six types, corresponding to the six sense bases: seeing forms with the eye, hearing sounds with the ear, smelling odors with the nose, tasting flavors with the tongue, feeling physical sensations through the body, and experiencing mental

[7] Samyutta-nikaya III (PTS), p. 59.
[8] Abhisamuc, p.4. Vibhanga (PTS), p.72

impressions or thoughts through the mind[9]. All bodily and mental sensations fall under this aggregate. Feelings are inherently impermanent, and clinging to pleasure or resisting pain is a source of suffering.

The third aggregate is the Aggregate of Perceptions (Saññākkhandha). Likewise, perceptions arise in six forms, each connected to one of the six internal sense faculties and their corresponding external objects. These are formed through the interaction between our senses and the outside world. Perceptions are what allow us to recognize and identify both physical and mental objects.[10]Perception allows us to recognize and label objects, sounds, smells, tastes, and mental events. It is how we distinguish between different things (e.g., recognizing a tree vs. a car). It also includes memory, which influences how we interpret experiences. However, perception can be misshaped or subdued to illusion**.** For instance: Seeing a rope in dim light and mistaking it for a snake, feeling fear, and then realizing the mistake.

The fourth aggregate is the Aggregate of Mental Formations (Saṅkhārakkhandha). This category includes all volitional actions, whether wholesome or unwholesome. What we commonly refer to as karma falls under this aggregate. The Buddha defined karma as volition (cetana), stating: "Monks, it is volition that I call karma. Having willed, one acts through body, speech, and mind."[11] Volition refers to mental activity or formation that directs the mind toward actions that are good, bad, or neutral activities[12]. Like feelings and perceptions, mental

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[9] Samyutta-nikaya III (PTS), p.60

[10] Mental Formations is term now generally used to represent the wide meaning of the word samkhara in the list of Five Aggregates.

[11] Anguttara-nikaya (Colombo 1929), p. 590

[12] Abhisamuc, p.6.

formations are also of six types, based on the interaction between the six internal sense faculties and their corresponding external objects, both physical and mental[13]. However, unlike sensations and perceptions, which are not intentional and do not produce karmic results, mental formations involve conscious intention and can generate karma. These include mental factors such as attention (manasikāra), will (chanda), determination (abhimokkha), confidence (saddhā), concentration (samādhi), wisdom (paññā), energy (vīriya), desire (rāga), aversion (paṭigha), ignorance (avijjā), pride (māna), and the belief in a self (sakkāya-diṭṭhi), among others.

The fifth aggregate is the Aggregate of Consciousness (Viññāṇakkhandha). Consciousness is the awareness or recognition that arises based on one of the six sense faculties—eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind, and their corresponding external objects—forms, sounds, smells, tastes, tangible things, and mental objects such as thoughts or ideas. For example, visual consciousness (cakkhu-viññāṇa) arises through the eye in response to visible forms, while mental consciousness (mano-viññāṇa) arises through the mind in response to mental objects or thoughts (dhamma). Consciousness does not function independently; it is linked to the other faculties. Like sensations, perceptions, and volitions, there are six types of consciousness, each associated with one of the six internal sense bases and their respective external objects.[14]

It's important to understand that consciousness itself doesn't identify or recognize objects. It merely serves as an awareness of the presence of an object. For instance, when the eye comes into contact with a color—say, pink—visual consciousness arises. This consciousness

[13] Samyutta- nikaya III (PTS), p. 60
[14] Samyutta- nikaya III (PTS), p. 61

only registers that a color is present; it does not identify it as pink. At this stage, there is no recognition involved. Recognition comes from perception, which is the third of the five aggregates. The term “visual consciousness” is a philosophical way of referring to what we commonly call “seeing,” but seeing in this context doesn’t imply recognition. The same principle applies to all other forms of consciousness.

It must be emphasized again that, in Buddhist philosophy, there is no permanent, unchanging entity that can be identified as a ‘Self,’ ‘Soul,’ or ‘Ego’ in contrast to matter. Consciousness (viññāṇa) should not be misunderstood as some kind of spirit that exists independently from the physical world. This point is especially important because there has long been a mistaken belief that consciousness is a lasting Self or Soul that persists unchanged throughout life, an idea that has endured from ancient times up to the present.

One of the Buddha ‘s own disciples, named Sati, held that the Master taught: “It is the same consciousness that transmigrates and wanders around.’’ The Buddha asked him what he meant by “consciousness’. Sati replied classically: “It is that which expresses, which feels, which experiences the results of good and bad deed here and there.’’

“You foolish one,” the Master rebuked, “have you ever heard me teach the Dhamma in such a way? Haven’t I repeatedly explained that consciousness arises dependent on conditions—that without conditions, there is no arising of consciousness?” Then the Buddha proceeded to clarify further: “Consciousness is identified based on the specific condition from which it arises. When it arises due to the eye and visible forms, it is called visual consciousness. When it arises from the ear and sounds, it is auditory consciousness. When it comes from the nose and smells, it is olfactory consciousness. When it arises through the tongue and tastes, it is gustatory

consciousness. When it comes from the body and physical sensations, it is tactile consciousness. And when it arises from the mind and mental objects—such as thoughts and ideas—it is known as mental consciousness."[15]

The Buddha then elaborated with an analogy: Just as a fire is named based on the material it burns, when it burns wood, it's called a wood fire; when it burns straw, it's called a straw fire, likewise, consciousness is identified by the specific condition that gives rise to it.

Building on this idea, the great commentator Buddhaghosa explains: A fire that burns because of wood continues only as long as the wood is present. When the wood is gone, the fire ceases at that spot because its condition has changed. The fire doesn't move on to ignite splinters and become a splinter-fire. Similarly, consciousness that arises through the eye and visible forms occurs only at the sense base—the eye—when the necessary conditions are present: the eye, visible forms, light, and attention. Once those conditions disappear, that specific consciousness ceases. It does not shift to another sense base, like the ear, and become auditory consciousness.[16]

The Buddha clearly stated that consciousness is dependent on form (matter), feeling (sensation), perception, and mental formations, it cannot exist on its own, separate from these. He declared:

Consciousness can arise and function with matter as its means, its object, and its support (rūpupāya, rūpārammaṇa, rūpapatiṭṭhā); and, taking delight in it, consciousness may grow,

[15] Ibid.
[16] Majjhima-nikayatthakatha, Papancasudani II (PTS), pp. 306-307

expand, and develop. Similarly, consciousness can depend on sensation, perception, or mental formations as its basis, using them as its means, object, and support, and by taking pleasure in them, it may likewise grow, increase, and evolve.

If someone were to claim, "I can demonstrate the appearance, disappearance, arising, passing, growth, or development of consciousness apart from form, sensation, perception, and mental formations," they would be speaking of something that has no reality, it simply does not exist.[17]

In essence, these are the five Aggregates. What we commonly refer to as a 'person,' 'self,' or 'I' is merely a conventional term applied to the collection of these five components. They are all impermanent and continuously changing. "What is impermanent is suffering (dukkha)." This reflects the Buddha's teaching: "In short, the five Aggregates subject to clinging are dukkha." They never remain the same even for two consecutive moments. Here B is not equal to B, because letter B is not a real B, our ignorance causes us to see the letter B as a real B existing from its own side. But all that is actually there are three lines placed in a particular arrangement. B is the mental label we learned to put on that base of three lines. If we investigate and search for where the B-ness is on those lines, we cannot find it. If we look for the characteristic of B within this curved lines or vertical line, we cannot find it. This proves that the appearance of a real, independent, truly existing B is a mental construct, one that is nonexistent from its own side, not existing independently on its own. They are in a constant fluctuation, arising and passing away moment by moment.

[17] Samyutta-nikaya III (PTS)

"O Brahmana, human life is like a mountain river[18], rushing swiftly, carrying everything with it. There isn't a moment, not even a split second, when it stops flowing; it moves on endlessly. In the same way, Brahmana, human life is constantly moving and ever-changing." As the Buddha said to Ratthapala: "The world is in constant motion and is impermanent.

All phenomena arise and pass away purely through a chain of cause and effect. There is no lasting substance within them. Nothing lies behind these processes that could be considered a permanent Self (Ātman), a fixed identity, or anything that truly qualifies as "I." It becomes clear, then, that none of the five aggregates—form, sensation, perception, mental formations, or consciousness—can genuinely be regarded as the self. However, when these physical and mental aggregates function together in dependence on one another, a sense of a "self" is imputed onto this process. This "I" is merely a conceptual label, a mental construction—one of the 52 mental formations described in the *Dhammasangani*, the first book of the Abhidhamma. This mistaken belief in a real self is known as *sakkāya-diṭṭhi*, the false view of self.

"Mere suffering exists, but no sufferer is found;

The deeds are, but no doer is found".[19]

There is no unchanging entity behind the motion, it is just motion itself. It's not accurate to say that life moves; rather, life is movement. Life and movement are one and the same. Similarly, there isn't a separate thinker behind thoughts, thought itself is the thinker. If there is no thought, no thinker remains. This is why the Buddhist perspective stands in complete opposition to the Cartesian view expressed in *cogito ergo sum,* "I think, therefore I am."

[18] Anguttara-nikaya (Colombo, 1929)
[19] Visuddhimagga (PTS edition)

Nowadays, we are wondering if life possesses a start. The Buddha teaches: “Monks, the cycle of rebirth (samsara) has no discernible starting point. It is impossible to find the original beginning of beings endlessly wandering through existence, trapped by ignorance and driven by craving.”[20] Furthermore, in regard to ignorance, the root cause of this ongoing cycle, the Buddha explains: “The origin of ignorance cannot be identified in such a way that we could say there was a time before which ignorance did not exist.”[21] Thus, it cannot be claimed that there was ever a time when life did not exist at all.

In conclusion, this is the meaning of the Noble Truth of Dukkha. It is important to understand this First Noble Truth clearly because, as the Buddha says, “he who sees dukkha sees also the rising of dukkha, sees also the cessation of dukkha, and sees also the path leading to the cessation of dukkha.’’[22]

This does not imply that a Buddhist’s life is sad or joyless, as some mistakenly believe. In fact, a genuine Buddhist is among the happiest of all beings. Free from fear and worry, they remain calm and peaceful at all times, unaffected by change or misfortune, because they understand the true nature of reality. The Buddha himself was never sorrowful or depressed, he was fully enlightened.

Even though suffering exists in life, a Buddhist should not respond with sadness, anger, or impatience. Buddhism teaches that one of the major unwholesome states is *repugnance* or hatred. This *repugnance* (*pratigha*) is defined as ill-will directed toward others, toward suffering itself, and toward the things associated with suffering. Its role is to lead to negative states of

[20] Samyutta-nikaya (PTS edition)
[21] Samyutta-nikaya (PTS edition)
[22] Samyutta-nikaya V (PTS), p. 437.

mind and harmful actions.[23] Therefore, reacting to suffering with impatience or anger is misguided. Such reactions don't eliminate suffering, they only add to it and make an already difficult situation worse. What is truly needed is not emotional reactivity, but a clear understanding of suffering: how it arises, how it can end, and how to approach it wisely, with patience, intelligence, determination, and effort.

Buddhism is not about having a gloomy, sorrowful, or discouraged state of mind, such attitudes are actually seen as hindrances to realizing the Truth. In fact, it's important to consider that joy is one of the seven *Factors of Enlightenment,* along with mindfulness, investigation, energy, rapture (joy), tranquility, concentration, and equanimity. These are essential mental qualities to be developed in the pursuit of awakening and the realization of Nirvana.

2.9 The second Noble Truth

Samudaya: 'The Arising of Dukkha'

The root of this suffering is thirst, a craving or attachment, that leads to rebirth and repeated becoming (ponobhavika). This craving is driven by strong desire and clinging (nandiragasahagata), constantly seeking new forms of pleasure. It manifests in three main ways: (1) craving for sensory pleasures (*kama-tanha*), (2) craving for continued existence or becoming (bhava-tanha), and (3) craving for non-existence or self-destruction (vibhava-tanha)[24]

It is this craving, this thirst, desire, and greed appearing in many forms, that gives rise to all suffering and fuels the ongoing cycle of existence. However, it should not be mistaken as a "first cause," because in Buddhism, there is no such thing as a single, absolute beginning. Everything arises in dependence on something else; all phenomena are interrelated and

[23] Abhisamuc, p. 7.
[24] Mahavagga (1922), p. 9.

conditional. Even this craving (tanha), identified as the origin of *dukkha*, arises based on sensation (vedana),[25] which in turn arises from contact (phassa), and so the cycle continues. This interconnected process is known as the doctrine of *Dependent Origination* or *Conditioned Genesis*. According to this view, nothing exists independently or in isolation, everything is conditioned, relative, and interdependent. This is the Buddhist understanding of relativity.[26]

Craving or "thirst" is recognized as the most evident, immediate, and central cause of suffering, it is the primary and most pervasive factor.[27] As a result, in some passages of the original Pali texts, the term samudaya (the origin of *dukkha*) is explained to include not only *tanha* (craving), but also other mental defilements and impurities. However, *tanha* is consistently given the foremost position among these causes.[28]

The term "thirst" or "craving," as used here, refers not only to the desire for and attachment to sensory pleasures, wealth, and power, but also to the attachment to ideas and ideals, such as views, opinions, theories, concepts, and beliefs. This form of craving is known as dhamma-tanha.[29]

From the Buddha's perspective, all conflicts and problems in the world, from minor disputes within families to large-scale wars between nations, stem from this self-centered craving or "thirst."[30] (For example, the ongoing war in the Gaza Strip between Hamas and Israel is difficult to resolve because the underlying selfish craving persists on both sides.) From this

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[25] Majjhima nikaya.
[26] Rahula, Walpola, What the Buddha Taught (Publisher Group West, 1974), p. 53
[27] Abhisamuc, p. 43.
[28] Vibhanga (PTS)
[29] Majjhima-nikaya; Samyutta-nikaya.
[30] Majjhima-nikaya.

perspective, economic, political, and social issues all have their roots in this same craving. Well-meaning leaders who attempt to address global conflicts by focusing solely on political or economic solutions are only dealing with surface-level symptoms. They fail to reach the deeper cause. As the Buddha told Rattapala: "The world is in want, driven by craving, and bound by it.

It is easily seen that all the wrongdoings in the world are created by selfish desire. It is not hard to understand. But how this desire, thirst, is able to make re-existence and re-becoming is a problem not easy to grasp. It is at this time we have to discuss the profound philosophical side of the Second Noble Truth corresponding to the philosophical side of the First Noble Truth. We must have some idea about the theory of karma and rebirth.

First, we discuss the four types of nutriments as essential causes or conditions that sustain and continue the existence of living beings: (1) physical or material food (kabalinkarahara), (2) sensory contact between our sense organs (including the mind) and the external world (phassahara), (3) consciousness (vinnanahara), and (4) mental intention or volition (manosancetanahara).[31]

Of the four nutriments, the last—mental volition—refers to the will to live, to continue existing, to be reborn, to persist, and to strive for more. It drives the process of becoming through both wholesome and unwholesome actions. This is essentially what is meant by volition, which, as previously mentioned, the Buddha identified as karma. Regarding this mental volition, the Buddha stated: "When one understands the nutriment of mental volition, one understands the three forms of craving (tanha)"[32]. In essence, terms such as craving, volition, mental volition,

[31] Majjhima-nikaya
[32]Majjhima-nikaya

and karma all point to the same underlying force, the desire or will to be, to exist, to become, to acquire more, and to expand. This is the root cause of the arising of *dukkha* (suffering), and it is found within the Aggregate of Mental Formations—one of the Five Aggregates.

Therefore, we must carefully and clearly understand and remember that the cause or seed of dukkha's arising lies within dukkha itself, it does not come from outside. Likewise, we must also remember that the cause or seed of dukkha's cessation, its destruction, is also found within dukkha itself, not from any external source. This is reflected in the original Pali texts: *"*Yam kinci samudayadhammam sabbam tam nirodhadhammam", meaning, "Whatever is subject to arising is also subject to cessation."[33] Thus, dukkha (the Five Aggregates) inherently contains both the conditions for its arising and the potential for its cessation.

Buddhism understands karma as *volitional actions*, not to all actions in general. Volition, like desire, can be either relatively good or bad. As a result, karma can also be either good (kusala) or bad (akusala). Good karma leads to positive outcomes, while bad karma brings about negative results. However, whether karma is good or bad, it remains within the cycle of continued existence, samsara.

The law of cause and effect must not be confounded with the so-called 'moral justice' or any kind of 'reward and punishment'. The concept of reward and punishment or the moral justice, comes up of the idea of a supreme being, a God, who sits in judgment, who is the law-maker and who makes the decision what is right and wrong. The word 'justice' is unclear and perilous, And, it does more harm than good to the humanity. Whereas, the principle of karma is the principle of cause and effect, of action and reaction; it is the natural principle, which has

[33] Majjhima-nikaya III (PTS), p. 280; Samyutta IV, pp. 47, 107.

nothing to do with concept of justice or reward and punishment. If good action will create good results and of course bad action will cause bad results. It is not justice or reward and punishment administered by anybody or any power sitting and judging on your action It is fair and just, because the principle of cause and effect works out in the virtue of its own principle.

2.10 The Third Noble Truth

Nirodha: The Cessation of Dukkha.

The third truth is that there is freedom, liberation or emancipation from suffering, from the continuity of dukkha. This what we usually called the Noble Truth of the Cessation of dukkha (Dukkhaniroda-ariyasacca), the end of suffering, leading to enlightenment, that is Nibbana,

To eradicate dukkha completely we have to eradicate the principal root of dukkha, which is **thirst** (tanha), as we mentioned earlier. Consequently, Nirvana is also come from by the term Tanhakkhaya 'Extinction of Thirst'.

So, what is Nirvana? The conventional human language could not answer the question completely and satisfactorily, simply because human language is conventional and limited. Therefore, it cannot express or explain the nature of the Absolute Truth or Ultimate Reality that is Nirvana. All in all, conventional language that is made of and utilized by human beings and the masses to convey things and ideas experienced by their sense organs and their mind. Then, a supermundane experience like kind of the Absolute Truth will be not of such a classification. And, sometime language creates misunderstanding of the truth.

However, we cannot do without language. According to Buddhism, nirvana is the ultimate state of enlightenment and freedom from suffering and rebirth. It is the highest goal of

Buddhist practice. Nirvana is a state of perfect peace and happiness, the extinction of desire, hatred, and ignorance.

Let us consider some definitions and descriptions of Nirvana as discovered in the original Pali texts:

"It is the complete cessation of that very 'thirst' (tanha), giving it up, renouncing it, emancipation from it, detach from it."[34]

"Calming of all conditioned things, giving up all defilements, extinction of thirst, detachment, cessation, Nibbana".[35]

"O bhikkhus, what is the absolute (Asamkhata, unconditioned)? It is, O bhikkhus, the extinction of desire, the extinction of hatred, the extinction of illusion. This, O bhikkhus, is called Absolute." [36]

"O Radha, the extinction of "thirst" is Nibbana."[37]

"O bhikkhus, whatever there may be things conditioned or unconditioned, among them detachment (viraga) is the highest. That is to say, freedom from conceit, destruction of thirst, the uprooting of attachment, the cutting off of continuity, the extinction of 'thirst', detachment, cessation, Nibbana." [38]

There was one direct question "What is Nibbana?" made by a disciple Parivrajaka, and the answer of Sariputta, the chief disciple of the Buddha was: "The extinction of desire, the extinction of hatred, the extinction of illusion." That is equivalent to the definition of Asamkhata given by the Buddha (above).[39]

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[34] Mhvg. (Alutgama, 1922), p.10; Samyutta Verse p. 421.
[35] Samyutta I, p. 136.
[36] Ibid. IV, p. 359
[37] Ibid, II, p.190
[38] Anguttara-nikaya (PTS) II, p.34
[39] Samyutta (PTS) IV, p. 251.

The cessation of Continuity and becoming is Nibbana.

Nirvana is not any annihilation of self, because there is no self to annihilate. If any, that is the annihilation of the illusion, of the wrong idea of self.

If we say that Nirvana is negative or positive, it is not correct. The concept of 'negative' and 'positive' are relative, and are inside the sphere of duality. These terms are not able to be utilized to Nirvana, the Absolute Truth, that is beyond duality and relativity.

In Samyutta-nikaya sutta, the Buddha clearly utilize the term Truth in place of Nirvana: "I will teach you the Truth and the Path leading to the Truth."[40]Here the Truth certainly means Nirvana.

The Mahayana consider Nirvana as not being different from Samsara.[41] And the same thing is Samsara or Nirvana with respect the way you look at it, subjectively or objectively. This Mahayana perspective was perhaps established out of the thinking found in the original Theravada Pali texts, to that we have just spoken earlier.

Nirvana is neither cause nor effect. It is beyond cause and effect. Truth is not a result nor an effect. It is not created like a mystic, spiritual, mantal state such as dhyana or samadhi. Truth Is, Nirvana Is. The only thing we can do is to see it, to realize it. There is a Path leading to the realization of Nirvana. Yet, Nirvana is not the result of the path.[42]You might get to the mountain along a path, but the mountain is not the result of the path.

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[40] Samyutta Verse (PTS), p. 369

[41] Nagarjuna clearly says that 'Samsara has no difference whatever from Nirvana, and Nirvana has no difference whatever from Samsara'. (Madhya, Kari XXV, p.19)

[42] It is good to remember here among nine supra-mundane dharmas (navalo-kuttara-dhamma) Nirvana is beyond magga (path) and phala (fruition).

We may ask: “What is there after Nirvana?” This question is not able to arise, because Nirvana is the Ultimate Truth. And, if it is Ultimate, there can be nothing after it. If there is anything after Nirvana, then that would be the Ultimate Truth and not Nirvana.

They who have realized and understand the Truth, Nirvana, are the happiest being in the world. They are free from all complexes and obsessions, the worries and troubles that torment others. Their mental health is perfect. They do not regret the past, nor do they ponder over the future. They lives totally in the present.[43] Therefore, they appreciates and enjoys the life in the purest sense without self-projections. They are exultant, their faculties pleased, free from anxiety, serene and peaceful.[44] Because they are free from selfish desire, hatred, ignorance, conceit, pride, and all kind of defilements, they will be pure and gentle, full of universal loving-kindness, compassion, empathy, understanding and tolerance. So, their service to others is of purest, for they have no thought of self. They acquire nothing, they gather nothing, not even anything spiritual, because they are free from the illusion of self, and the thirst for becoming.

Nirvana is beyond our concept of good and bad, right and wrong, existence and non-existence. It is above our method of thinking and reasoning. Nirvana has to be understanded by the sage within themselves. If we follow the Path patiently and diligently, train, purge ourselves seriously, exactly, and achieve the crucial spiritual progress, we might in some day over time understand it inside ourselves, and not necessary challenging ourselves with confusing and flowery words.

Consequently, let us go to the Path which leads to the awareness of Nirvana.

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[43] Samyutta-nikaya I (PTS), p. 5.
[44] Majjhima-nikaya II (PTS), p.121

2.11 The Fourth Noble Truth

The Path (Magga)

The Four Noble Truth is the Noble Truth of **The Path** leading to the cessation of dukkha. This is known as the 'Middle Way' because it bypasses two extremes: one extreme being the search for happiness through the enjoyments of sensual pleasures, that is "base, crude, ignoble, and pointless the way of the ordinary people"; the other being the search for happiness through indulgence in self-mortification, which is "painful, unworthy and pointless." Avoiding these two extremes. Having himself first attempted these two extremes, and having found them to be vain, the Buddha realized through personal experience the Middle Path (Middle Way), "which gives rise to vision and understanding, that leads to Peace, to Insight, to Enlightenment, to Nirvana". And, this Middle Path is ordinarily referred to as the Noble Eightfold Path, that is:

1. Right View, (Right Understanding)
2. Right Thought,
3. Right Speech,
4. Right Action,
5. Right Livelihood,
6. Right Effort,
7. Right Mindfulness,
8. Right Concentration or Immersion.

The Buddha has devoted himself during 45 years or so, dealing in some way or other with this Path. He expounded it in different technique and in different words to different people, according to the level of their improvement and their capability to understand and follow him. Although the gist of those many thousand discourses dispersed in the Buddhist scriptures is

found in the Noble Eightfold Path. The eight elements mentioned above are linked together and each helps the cultivation of the others. They are interconnected.

The Eightfold Path factors divide into three groups: (1) Ethical Conduct, (2) Mental Discipline (the Concentration), and (3) Wisdom. It will be convenient for coherent and better Understanding of the eight divisions of the Path, if we group them and illustrate them according to these three headers.

Ethical Conduct, is created on the vast concept of universal love and compassion for all sentient beings, on which the Buddha's teaching is based. Ethical Conduct includes three factors of the Eightfold Path: that is, Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood.

Right Speech, means abstention (a) from telling lies, (b) from backbiting and slander and speak that might bring about hatred, enmity, disunity, and disharmony among individuals or groups of persons, (c) from harsh, rude, impolite malicious and abusive language. When we abstain from these forms of wrong and harmful speech. We naturally have to speak the truth, the harmony, have to utilize words that are friendly and benevolent, pleasant and gentle, meaningful and useful. We should not speak at the wrong time and place. If we cannot say something good, we better keep 'noble silence'.

Right Action, aims at promotion moral, honorable and peaceful conduct. This admonishes us that we should abstain from destroying life, from stealing, from dishonest dealings, from illegitimate sexual intercourse, and that we should also help others to lead a peaceful and good life in the right manner.

Right Livelihood, means that we should restrain from creating our living through career that making harm to others, such as trading in arms and lethal weapons, intoxicating drinks, poisons, killing animals, deception, fraud, etc., and should live by a career that is honest, ethical

and innocent of harm to others. Promoting compassion, understanding, and awareness. This moral conduct focuses on promoting a happy and harmonious life both for individual and for society. It is considered as the crucial foundation for all higher spiritual achievement.

Next comes to Mental Discipline, that included three other factors of the Eightfold Path: That is, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration.

Right effort, is dynamic will, (a) to prevent evil and un wholesome states of mind from rising, and (b) to rid of such bad and unwholesome states of mind which have already risen inside a man, and also (c) to create, to make to rise, good and wholesome states of mind not yet risen, and (d) to develop and bring to perfection a sense of calm and peace states of mind with the world.

Right Mindfulness, is to be diligently aware, mindful and attentive with respect to (a) the activities of the body, (b) sensation or feelings, (c) the activities of the mind, and (d) concepts, thoughts, and things.

The exercise of concentration on breathing is one of the popular practices, connected with the body, for mental progress. Usually there are several other ways of developing attentiveness relative to the body, such as modes of meditation.

With respect to feelings and sensations, we have to notice all types of feelings, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral, and how they appear and disappear within ourselves.

Regarding the movements of mind inside ourselves, we should know whether our mind is distracted or focused, full of lust or not, deluded or not. In this way we have to be aware of all movements of mind, how they rise and disappear.

Concerning concepts, thoughts, and things, we should realize their nature, how they appear and disappear, how they are developed, how they are suppressed, and destroyed, etc.

The last factor of Mental Discipline is **Right Concentration**. Right Concentration (*Sammā Samādhi*) is the eighth factor in the **Noble Eightfold Path** in Buddhism. It refers to the practice of developing deep states of meditative absorption (*jhana*) that lead to wisdom and liberation. Right Concentration is about training the mind to become steady, focused, and free from distraction.

Key aspects of Right Concentration:

1. Focused Attention – The ability to direct and sustain attention on a single object, such as the breath, a mantra, or a visualization.
2. Freedom from Hindrances – Overcoming the five hindrances (*sensual desire, ill will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry, doubt*) that cloud the mind.
3. Development of Jhana (Meditative Absorptions) – Deep mental states characterized by joy, tranquility, and equanimity. The Buddha described four main *jhanas*:
    - First Jhana – Applied and sustained thought, joy, and bliss.
    - Second Jhana – Inner stillness, joy, and bliss without applied thought.
    - Third Jhana – Deep contentment and equanimity, fading of joy.
    - Fourth Jhana – Pure equanimity and one-pointedness of mind.

Right Concentration works in harmony with Right Mindfulness and Right Effort to cultivate wisdom (*panna*) and insight (*vipassana*). It leads to a mind capable of seeing reality as it truly is, it is free from attachments and delusions.

For a beginning meditator like ourselves, developing Right Concentration starts with basic mindfulness practices like breath awareness (*anapanasati*) or loving-kindness meditation (*metta*

bhavana). As concentration deepens, the mind becomes more peaceful and naturally inclined toward wisdom.

Therefore, the mind is cultivated and developed through Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration. Now we go to the last two factors of the Noble Eightfold Path, that is, Right thought, and Right Understanding:

Right Understanding, In Buddhism, *Right Understanding* (or *Right View*) is the first step on the Noble Eightfold Path, a core teaching of the Buddha that outlines the way to end suffering and achieve enlightenment. Right Understanding is about seeing and comprehending the true nature of reality, and it is the Four Noble Truths which illustrate things as they really are. Therefore, Right Understanding is ultimately reduced to the understanding of the Four Noble Truths. This understanding is the highest wisdom which realizes the Ultimate Reality. According to Buddhism there are two types of understanding: One, what we usually call understanding is knowledge, an accumulated memory, an intellectual grasping of a subject according to certain data. This called ‘knowing correspondingly’. And it is not very deep. Another one is really deep understanding is called ‘penetration’, realizing a thing in its true nature, without name and label. This penetration is possible only when the mind is free from all impurities and is fully developed through meditation.[45] Right Understanding isn't just intellectual knowledge, it's about internalizing these truths deeply and applying them to one's life. It’s the foundation for developing wisdom (*prajna*) and guides one's actions, speech, and thoughts in alignment with true reality.

[45] Visuddhimagga (PTS), p.510

Right Understanding (or Right View), is considered the starting point on the path because, without understanding these truths, it's difficult to progress toward liberation. Here are some practical benefits of Right Mindfulness:

1. Seeing things as they are

Right Understanding helps you see the impermanence of life. For example, recognizing that material possessions or situations won't bring lasting happiness can make you less attached to them and more focused on cultivating inner peace and gratitude.

2. Responding with compassion

When we understand that everyone experiences suffering in their own way (*dukkha*), it's easier to approach others with kindness and empathy, even in challenging situations.

3. Reducing cravings and attachments

By grasping that craving leads to suffering, we can work toward letting go of desires that create stress, whether it's a need for approval, wealth, or control over situations.

4. Making mindful choices

Right Understanding guides our actions to align with wisdom and mindfulness. For example, before reacting in anger, you might pause and reflect: "Does this response stem from craving or ignorance? Will it add to suffering, or reduce it?"

5. Living with purpose

It can help you prioritize what truly matters, like fostering meaningful connections or engaging in activities that bring fulfillment, rather than chasing fleeting pleasures or superficial goals.

6. Accepting challenges gracefully

Understanding that suffering is part of life's nature can help you handle difficulties with greater resilience, knowing they're an opportunity to learn and grow. In essence, Right Understanding becomes a good lens through which you view every aspect of life. It encourages mindfulness, compassion, and wise choices, creating a ripple effect of positivity in your actions, relationships, and mental state.

Different perspectives on Right Understanding

According to the Buddhism, **Right Understanding** is the first step in achieving enlightenment. It involves gaining insight into the true nature of reality and understanding the Four Noble Truths. Different schools within Buddhism have different perspectives on what constitutes Right Understanding.

The **Theravada** school emphasizes the importance of analytical thinking and reasoning, encouraging individuals to question their beliefs and assumptions. They believe that Right Understanding comes from developing an understanding of the three marks of existence: impermanence, suffering, and emptiness. This leads to the realization that all phenomena are interconnected and not-self, which is the ultimate goal of therapy.

In contrast, the **Mahayana** school places more emphasis on compassion and empathy towards oneself and others. They believe that Right Understanding comes from cultivating a sense of selflessness and non-attachment through practices such as mindfulness and loving-kindness meditation. By doing so, one can break free from the cycle of birth and death and attain enlightenment. Overall, both schools agree that Right Understanding is crucial for achieving

spiritual growth and liberation from suffering. However, they differ in their approach to achieving it, highlighting the flexibility and adaptability of Buddhist teachings.

In Conclusion, "**Right Understanding**" is an important concept in Buddhism that refers to the ability to comprehend and understand the true nature of reality. It involves developing a thorough understanding of the Four Noble Truths, which are the foundations of Buddhist philosophy. Through Right Understanding, one can achieve enlightenment and attain Nirvana. In conclusion, "Right Understanding" is essential for anyone seeking to follow the path of Buddha and live a fulfilling life. By cultivating this virtue, individuals can overcome suffering and attain happiness through inner peace and wisdom.

Right Thought, Right thought denotes the thoughts of selfless renunciation or detachment, thoughts of love and thoughts of non-violence, which are extended to all beings. It is very significant to note here that thoughts of selfless detachment, love and non-violence are grouped on the side of wisdom. This clearly shows that true wisdom is endowed with these noble qualities, and that all thoughts of selfish desire, ill-will, hatred, and violence are the result of a lack of wisdom in all spheres of life whether individual, social, or political.

The most important thing for right speech and right action is right thought, in fact all the three (right speech, right action, and right thought) are interconnected. The reason why right thought is most important because, as Buddhism teaches, everything starts from thought. A passage in the Dhammapada phases it this way: "With our minds, we make the world. Speak or

act with kindness, and happiness will follow you as sure as a shadow follows the person who casts it." (Rev. Marvin Harada, The Eightfold Path: Right Thought, 30 March 2023),[46]

Thought is the beginning point that leads to speech and conduct. An angry thought leads to angry words, which leads to angry actions. On the contrary, if a person who has good heart and mind of kindness who will act with their thoughts with loving-kindness words.

All our conduct or behavior are rooted in our thought. So, in order to speak and act wisely, we need to address our thoughts. Most religions teach a sense of morality or ethics external to us that we should follow as rules or commandments. But Buddhism addresses our mind, our thoughts, that is the source of how we speak and act.

The question then arises, how should we think? How can we control our thoughts, or at least remove the bad thoughts? First, we have to realize that we cannot control our thoughts. Because good thoughts come and go; bad thoughts come and go like a flowing river. We could not hold a good thought any more than we can eliminate or stop having a bad thought. But if we have been nurtured in the Dharma (Dhamma), we start to see thoughts as they flow through our mind. Then, we are able to begin to reflect on those thoughts as they come and go. Deep reflection leads to being less judgmental of not only our thoughts, but also our life experiences. What we thought was a negative experience can be transformed into a great positive. Realizing a negative or ego-centered side of ourselves leads to insight, awakening, even humility. Seeing our arrogance or pride is at the same time the unfolding of humbleness. This is only possible because

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[46] https://www.lionsroar.com/right-thought.

of the light of the Dharma—the light of the Buddhist teachings that is illuminating our hearts and minds.

The Path, it is a way of life to be followed, practiced and developed by each individual. It is self-disciplined in body, word and mind, self-development and self-purification. It has nothing to do with belief, prayer, worship or ceremony. From that sense, it has nothing that might well-known be called religious. It is a Path leading to the understanding of The Ultimate Reality, to complete freedom, happiness and peace through moral, spiritual and intellectual perfection.

With respect to the Four Noble Truths, we have to get four functions to perform:

The First Noble Truth is dukkha, the nature of life, its suffering, its sorrows and joys, its imperfection and unsatisfactoriness, its impermanence and insubstantiality. With respect to this, our function is to understand it as a fact, clearly and completely.

The Second Noble Truth is the Origin (root) of Dukkha, that is desire, thirst, accompanied by all other passions, defilements and impurities. A mere understanding of this fact is not sufficient. At this moment, our function is to discard it, to eliminate it, to destroy and eradicate it.

The Third Noble Truth is the Cessation of Dukkha, Nirvana, the Absolute Truth, the Ultimate Reality. Here our function is to realize it. The Fourth Noble Truth is the Path leading to the realization of Nirvana. A mere of awareness of the Path, however complete, will not do. In this situation, our function is to follow it and keep to it.[47]

[47] Mahavagga , (Alutgama, 1922), p. 10.

The **Relationship** between **The Four Noble Truths** and **The Noble Eightfold Path**

The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path are deeply interconnected, and help each other hand in hand. It seems like one does not work without the other one. The Four Noble Truths provide the framework for understanding suffering, its root and its cessation, while the Eightfold Path is the practical method a Middle Way leading to end the suffering for achieving that cessation and reach liberation, ultimately attaining the so-called Nirvana.

2.12 How They Connect

1. The Fourth Noble Truth Directly Points to the Eightfold Path, The Fourth Noble Truth (Magga) states that the way to end suffering is through the Eightfold Path. This means that the Eightfold Path is the direct method for liberation.
2. The Eightfold Path Helps Overcome the Causes of Suffering, The Second Noble Truth (Samudaya) identifies craving (tanhā) as the root cause of suffering. The Eightfold Path works to reduce craving by developing wisdom (prajñā), ethical conduct (śīla), and mental discipline (samādhi).
3. Right View Aligns with Understanding the Four Noble Truths, the first step of the Eightfold Path (Right View) is about seeing the Four Noble Truths clearly and deeply. Without understanding suffering, its cause, and its cessation, one cannot walk the path effectively and correctly.
4. The Eightfold Path Leads to the End of Suffering (Nirvana), by following the Eightfold Path, one gradually removes ignorance (avijjā) and craving and greed, leading to the Third Noble Truth (Nirodha), the cessation of suffering.

2.13 In Summary

- The **Four Noble Truths** diagnose the human condition and prescribe a cure, a solution.
- The **Eightfold Path** is the practical guide to apply for that cure and a way how to solve the daily issues relating to the suffering.
- Practicing the Eightfold Path deepens the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, reinforcing their truth through direct experience and profound understanding of the natural reality. To see things as they really are.

The Eightfold Path is considered the way to reach the fourth Noble Truth (Magga), which is the method to end suffering. Essentially, the Four Noble Truths provide the framework of understanding the problem and solution, while the Eightfold Path offers the practical guidance to follow in order to achieve liberation from suffering.

Applying the Eightfold Path in your daily life can bring more mindfulness, compassion, and balance. And, remember, the Eightfold Path is not a linear journey but rather a continuous practice. By incorporating these principles gradually into your daily life, you'll likely notice a positive transformation in your overall well-being and outlook.

2.14 Other Primary Sources

Now, we try to review some other suttas regarding **The Four Noble Truths.**

First, **Saccavibhanga Sutta,**

On one occasion the Blessed One was living in the Deer Park at Isipatana (the Resort of Saints) near Varanasi (Benares). Then he addressed the monks saying: "O Monks." "Venerable Sir," replied those monks in assent to the Blessed One. Thereupon he said:

"The matchless Wheel of Dhamma set in motion by the Tathagata,[1] the Consummate One, the supremely Enlightened One, in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Varanasi, cannot be set in motion by a recluse or brahmana or Deva or Mara or Brahma or by anyone in the world. That is to say, it was a proclamation of the Four Noble Truths, by way of teaching, laying down, establishing, opening up, analyzing, and elucidating them.

"Of what four: It was a proclamation of the Noble Truth of suffering *(dukkha)*, by way of teaching... (as before) and elucidating it; of the Noble Truth of the arising (cause) of suffering... of the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering... of the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering. This matchless Wheel of Dhamma, monks, set in motion by the Tathagata, the Consummate One, the supremely Enlightened One, in the Deer Park at Isipatana near Varanasi, cannot be set in motion by a recluse... or by anyone in the world. That is to say, it was a proclamation of the Four Noble Truths, by way of teaching, laying down, establishing, opening up, analyzing, and elucidating them.

After the Blessed One left the Deer Park, the Sariputta continued addressed to the monks:

This the Venerable Sariputta said:

"Your reverence, the matchless Wheel of Dhamma set in motion by the Tathagata, the Consummate One, the supremely Enlightened One, in the Deer Park, at Isipatana near Varanasi, cannot be set in motion by a recluse or brahmana... (as before) in the world. That is to say, it was a proclamation of the Four Noble Truths, by way of teaching, laying down, establishing, opening up, analyzing, and elucidating them.

"Of what four? It was a proclamation of the Noble Truth of suffering *(dukkha)* by way of teaching... elucidating it; of the Noble Truth of the arising of suffering... of the Noble Truth of the cessation of suffering... of the Noble Truth of the Path leading to the cessation of suffering.

[……][48]

Second, **Maha-hatthipadopama Sutta,**

I have heard that on one occasion the Blessed One was staying near Savatthi in Jeta's Grove, Anathapindika's monastery. There Ven. Sariputta addressed the monks, saying, "Friend monks!"

"Yes, friend," the monks responded.

Ven. Sariputta said: "Friends, just as the footprints of all legged animals are encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant's footprint is reckoned the foremost among them in terms of size; in the same way, all skillful qualities are gathered under the four noble truths. Under which four? Under the noble truth of stress, under the noble truth of the origination of stress, under the noble truth of the cessation of stress, and under the noble truth of the path of practice leading to the cessation of stress.

"And what is the noble truth of stress? Birth is stressful, aging is stressful, death is stressful; sorrow, lamentation, pain, distress, & despair are stressful; not getting what is wanted is

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[48] For a very comprehensive account of the Four Noble Truths read *The Buddha's Ancient Path*, Piyadassi Thera, Buddhist Publication Society. Kandy, Sri Lanka (Ceylon). The above paragraph was translated from the Pali by Piyadassi Thera © 1999

stressful.[1] In short, the five clinging-aggregates are stressful. And which are the five clinging-aggregates? The form clinging-aggregate, the feeling clinging-aggregate, the perception clinging-aggregate, the fabrication clinging-aggregate, & the consciousness clinging-aggregate.

"And what is the form clinging-aggregate? The four great existents and the form derived from them. And what are the four great existents? The earth property, the liquid property, the fire property, & the wind property.

[……][49]

Third, **Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta**

"Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering — in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging objects.

"The origin of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is the craving that produces renewal of being accompanied by enjoyment and lust, and enjoying this and that; in other words, craving for sensual desires, craving for being, craving for non-being.

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[49] In passages where the Buddha defines stress, (e.g., SN 56.11, DN 22), he includes the statements, "association with the unbeloved is stressful; separation from the loved is stressful," prior to "not getting what one wants is stressful." For some reason, in passages where Ven. Sariputta defines stress (here and at MN 9 and MN 141), he drops these statements from the definition. The paragraph above is translated from the Pali by Thanissaro Bhikkhu © 2003

"Cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is remainderless fading and ceasing, giving up, relinquishing, letting go and rejecting, of that same craving.

"The way leading to cessation of suffering, as a noble truth, is this: It is simply the noble eightfold path, that is to say, right view, right intention; right speech, right action, right livelihood; right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration.

"Suffering, as a noble truth, is this.' Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. 'This suffering, as a noble truth, can be diagnosed.' Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before. 'This suffering, as a noble truth, has been diagnosed.' Such was the vision, the knowledge, the understanding, the finding, the light, that arose in regard to ideas not heard by me before.

[……][50]

The Eightfold Noble Path is found in the fourth Noble Truth, that we mentioned earlier in the Four Noble Truths.

2.15 Other Key Teachings of Buddhism

The Buddha teachings make a comprehensive whole. Among His other teachings is the concept of mindfulness (sati). **Mindfulness (Sati)** is a core concept in Buddhist teachings, particularly emphasized in the **Noble Eightfold Path**, where it is one of the elements of **Right Mindfulness**.

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[50] The above paragraph is translated from the Pali by Ñanamoli Thera, 1993.

It also plays a central role in modern psychological and meditative practices. Below are the key aspects of mindfulness (sati): Wisdom (understanding of the nature of reality), compassion (the ability to feel empathy and kindness towards yourself and others), and impermanence (recognizing that everything is constantly changing)) as central to Buddhist practice and understanding.

Now we go to the Literature Review in Chapter 3 that follows:

Chapter 3: Literature Review

This literature review will focus on commentaries on the **Four Noble Truths by contemporary masters and scholars**. Below will be selections from these masters on the explanation of the Four Noble Truths and the application of the Four Noble Truths.

(1) ***The Illustrated Dhammapada, Treasury of Truth***—Chapter 20, the Path, Buddhanet.net[51]

Verse 275. The Path to End Suffering

Entered then upon this path
you'll make an end of dukkha.
Freed in knowledge from suffering's stings
the Path's proclaimed by me.

Explanation: If you follow this path, you will reach the termination of suffering. This path has been revealed by me, after the extraction of arrows.

Comment: The Buddha begins with a gentle but firm encouragement: liberation is not random or accidental, it is the result of walking a path. The *path* here is the **Noble Eightfold Path**, the fourth of the **Four Noble Truths**. It is the bridge between recognizing suffering and actually overcoming it. This path is a gradual training, not a dogma, and anyone who diligently walks it will come to the end of suffering (*dukkha*), just as the Buddha did.

The second half of the verse highlights two key elements: **wisdom (paññā)** and **the authority of experience**. The "stings" of suffering refer to the mental poisons that keep beings bound to the wheel of samsara: greed, hatred, and delusion. These are like barbs lodged deep in

[51] https://www.buddhanet.net/dhammapada/d_path/

the psyche. Only through deep insight, gained by practicing mindfulness, concentration, and wisdom, can they be removed.

The Buddha proclaims the path not as a theorist but as one who has walked it, realized its fruits, and now points the way for others. His authority is not in divine revelation but in lived experience and profound compassion.

(2) Ajahn Sumedho: *The First Noble Truth, (A handful of Leaves)*[52]

"What is the Noble Truth of Suffering? Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering: in short the five categories affected by clinging are suffering.

There is this Noble Truth of Suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

This Noble Truth must be penetrated by fully understanding suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before.

This Noble Truth has been penetrated by fully understanding suffering: such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before."

[Samyutta Nikaya LVI, 11]

"The First Noble Truth with its three aspects is: "There is suffering, dukkha. Dukkha should be understood. Dukkha has been understood."

[52] https://www.buddhanet.net/4noble4/

This is a very skilful teaching because it is expressed in a simple formula which is easy to remember, and it also applies to everything that you can possibly experience or do or think concerning the past, the present or the future."

Comment: This passage encapsulates the profundity of the First Noble Truth not as a pessimistic statement, but as a clear-eyed recognition of the nature of conditioned existence. The Buddha doesn't merely list forms of suffering; he highlights how suffering pervades even the most fundamental aspects of life—birth, aging, illness, and death—thereby pointing us toward a deeper investigation of what we cling to and why.

The phrase *"the five categories affected by clinging are suffering"* is especially significant. It shifts the understanding of dukkha from external events to an internal process, namely, our attachment to impermanent phenomena (the five aggregates). This is where the insight turns transformative: suffering isn't just what happens to us, but how we relate to what happens.

The repeated refrain *"such was the vision, insight, wisdom, knowing and light that arose in me about things not heard before",* emphasizes that this truth was not inherited or believed, but directly realized. It also reinforces the *three phases of knowledge* the Buddha taught: knowing the truth, knowing the duty associated with the truth, and knowing that the duty has been fulfilled. This structure turns doctrine into living practice.

Overall, the paragraph invites not mere acceptance but deep contemplation: to see suffering clearly, understand its nature, and use that understanding as a gateway to liberation.

(3) The Four Noble Truths, from the Article Written by: *Joseph M. Kitagawa, Giuseppe Tucci,* last updated: Apr. 7, 2025, Article History[53]

"Awareness of these fundamental realities led the Buddha to formulate the Four Noble Truths: the truth of misery (dukkha, litterally "suffering" but connoting "uneasiness" or "dissatisfaction"), the truth that misery originates within the craving for pleasure and for being or nonbeing (*samudaya*), the truth that this craving can be eliminated (*nirodhu*), and the truth that this elimination is the result of following a methodical way or path."

The Eightfold Path

"The law of dependent origination, however, raises the question of how one may escape the continually renewed cycle of birth, suffering, and death. It is not enough to know that misery pervades all existence and to know the way in which life evolves; there must also be a means to overcome this process. The means to this end is found in the Eightfold Path which is constituted by right views, right aspirations, right speech, right conduct, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right meditational attainment."

[.....]

Comment: This passage elegantly connects the existential insight of the Buddha with the practical path toward liberation. The explanation of **dukkha** as not just "suffering," but also as *uneasiness* or *dissatisfaction*, is especially helpful—it broadens the reader's understanding beyond dramatic pain to the more subtle restlessness that marks ordinary life. This nuanced view

[53] https://www.britanica.com/topic/Buddhism/The -Four-Noble-Truths/

is essential, because it shows that even in pleasant or neutral experiences, the seeds of suffering lie hidden in craving and attachment.

The transition to the **law of dependent origination** is skillful: it highlights the dynamic process by which suffering arises, not from fate or a divine will, but from conditioned causes—chiefly, craving and ignorance. Yet the text wisely notes that knowledge alone isn't sufficient. Intellectual understanding must be paired with **practice**—this is where the **Eightfold Path** enters as both a guide and a remedy.

Each aspect of the path—from right view to right concentration—targets a different dimension of the human condition, aiming for a holistic transformation of how we see, speak, act, and think. This underscores Buddhism's unique blend of insight and ethics, contemplation and compassion.

(4) The Eightfold Path: Right Thought*,* by: *Rev. Marvin Harada*, 14 April, 2025[54]

"We can't control our thoughts, says Reverend Marvin Harada. But we can reflect on them, and doing that change everything.

On the Eightfold Path, right thought, right speech, and right action all go together and cannot be separated from each other. The most important is right thought, because—as Buddhism teaches—everything starts from thought. A passage in the Dhammapada phrases it this way: "With our minds, we make the world. Speak or act with kindness, and happiness will follow you as surely as a shadow follows the person who casts it."

[54] https://www.lionsroar.com/right-thought/

Thought is the starting point that leads to speech and conduct. An angry thought leads to angry words, which leads to angry actions. Haven't we all witnessed road rage while driving to work or to the store? A driver with angry thoughts shouts angry words at another driver and in some cases goes on to do something crazy and aggressive with their car. In contrast, acts of kindness are the result of a person who has a heart and mind of kindness and who expresses their thoughts with kind words."

Comment: This reflection captures the heart of the **Eightfold Path**'s ethical dimension by grounding it in everyday experience. Reverend Marvin Harada's statement *"We can't control our thoughts... but we can reflect on them",* echoes a key insight in mindfulness practice: that freedom doesn't come from suppressing thoughts, but from developing wise awareness of them. This kind of inner reflection allows us to transform unwholesome mental habits into wholesome ones.

By emphasizing that **right thought, right speech, and right action** are interwoven, the passage highlights the Buddha's teaching that inner transformation naturally expresses itself in outer behavior. The quote from the *Dhammapada "With our minds, we make the world..."* grounds the message in canonical wisdom, showing how thought is not passive but generative, shaping our world moment by moment.

The example of **road rage** is especially effective. It's familiar, visceral, and demonstrates how quickly an unexamined thought can escalate into harmful action. But the paragraph wisely contrasts this with **acts of kindness**, which originate from a mind trained in compassion. This speaks directly to the transformative power of cultivating right intention: a kind thought has the power to ripple out in speech and action, just as an angry one does.

(5) This is Suffering, By *Henepola Gunaratara* from Mindfulness in plain English[55]

"According to the Buddha, whatever life we lead, it has the nature of some aspect of suffering. Even if we consider ourselves happy for a while, this happiness is transitory by nature. This mean that at best, we can only find **temporary** happiness and pleasure in life.

Suffering (or unsatisfactoriness) can be distinguished in three types:

1. **Suffering of suffering**: this refers to the most obvious aspects like pain, fear and mental distress.

2. **Suffering of change**: refers to the problems that change brings, like joy disappears, nothing stays, decay and death.

3. **All-pervasive suffering**: this is the most difficult to understand aspect, it refers to the fact that we always have the potential to suffer or can get into problematic situations. Even death is not a solution in Buddhist philosophy, as we will simply find ourselves being reborn in a different body, which will also experience problems.

To illustrate this with the words of the 7th Dalai Lama (from 'Songs of spiritual change' translated by Glenn Mullin:

"Hundreds of stupid flies gather
On a piece of rotten meat,
Enjoying, they think, a delicious feast.
This image fits with the song
Of the myriads of foolish living beings

[55] https://viewonbuddhism.org/4_noble_truths.html

Who seek happiness in superficial pleasures;

In countless ways they try,

Yet I have never seen them satisfied."

Note that "suffering" is an inadequate translation of the word "Dukkha", but it is the one most commonly found, lacking a better word in English. "Dukkha" means "intolerable", "unsustainable", "difficult to endure", and can also mean "imperfect", "unsatisfying", or "incapable of providing perfect happiness". Interestingly enough, some people actually translate it as "stress".

Comment: This reflection does an excellent job of unfolding the **three types of dukkha** in a way that is both accessible and profound. By breaking dukkha down into its various dimensions—**suffering of suffering, suffering of change, and all-pervasive suffering**—the passage reveals the depth of the Buddha's insight into the human condition. It's not just about pain or misfortune, but about the very nature of existence as fragile, conditioned, and ultimately incapable of delivering lasting satisfaction.

The inclusion of the **7th Dalai Lama's verse** adds a poignant and poetic touch. The image of flies swarming rotten meat captures the tragic irony of our pursuit of fleeting pleasures, how beings chase temporary comfort, mistaking it for true happiness. It's not a moral judgment, but a compassionate observation of our shared human tendency to seek fulfillment in things that, by their nature, cannot satisfy us.

Especially valuable is the nuanced discussion of the word **dukkha** itself. Recognizing that "suffering" is an imperfect translation opens the door to a more contemplative and experiential

understanding. When dukkha is seen not just as "pain" but as **stress, unsustainability, or subtle dissatisfaction**, it becomes something we can observe directly in our daily lives—not just in moments of crisis, but even in success, pleasure, and comfort.

(6) The Dharma: The Teachings of the Buddha (different view from a contemporary Scholar)

The Dharma: The Teachings of the Buddha Summary: After achieving enlightenment, the Buddha gave his first sermon, teaching his disciples about suffering and the way to escape it. This teaching includes the Middle Way, the **Four Noble Truths**, and the **Eightfold Noble Path.** The truths that the Buddha revealed are called Dharma.

The Buddha's sermons and teachings pointed toward the true nature of the universe, what is known within Buddhism as the Dharma. He gave his first sermon on the outskirts of the city of Varanasi at a deer park called Sarnath. This first sermon presents an overview of suffering and the way out of suffering. It is called the **"Four Noble Truths."** The Buddha is often described as a physician who first diagnoses an illness and then suggests a medicine to cure the illness. The "Four Noble Truths" follow this pattern:

1. Life involves suffering, duhkha. The "illness" that the Buddha diagnosed as the human condition is duhkha, a term often rendered in English as "suffering" or "unsatisfactoriness." The Buddha spoke of three types of duhkha. First, there is the ordinary suffering of mental and physical pain. Second, there is the suffering produced by change, the simple fact that all things—including happy feelings and blissful states—are impermanent, as is life itself. Third, there is suffering produced by the failure to recognize that no "I" stands alone, but everything and everyone, including what we call our "self," is conditioned and interdependent.

2. Suffering is caused by desire and grasping. The Buddha saw that the impulse to crave, desire, or grasp something one doesn't have is the principal cause of suffering. Because of the impermanence and continuous change of all that we call "reality," the attempt to hold on to it is as doomed to frustration as the attempt to stake out a piece of a river.

3. There is a way out of suffering. This is the good news of the Dharma. It is possible to put an end to ego-centered desire, to put an end to duhkha and thus attain freedom from the perpetual sense of "unsatisfactoriness."

4. The way is the **"Noble Eightfold Path."** To develop this freedom, one must practice habits of ethical conduct, thought, and meditation that enable one to move along the path. These eight habits include: • *Right understanding*: Truly and deeply knowing, for example, that unwholesome acts and thoughts have consequences, as do wholesome acts and thoughts. [**…..**]

The above paragraphs are from:

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Comment: This summary does an excellent job of presenting the foundational elements of the Buddha's first teaching in a clear and structured manner. It captures not only the content of the **Four Noble Truths** but also the compassionate logic behind them. By comparing the Buddha to a physician, the text offers an accessible metaphor: diagnosing the human condition, identifying its cause, offering hope for healing, and prescribing a practical path toward liberation. This

[56] https://www.pluralism.org

analogy helps readers grasp that the Dharma is not just philosophical theory, but a lived path of transformation.

The explanation of **duḥkha** is especially valuable. By distinguishing between the three types of suffering—ordinary pain, suffering due to change, and the more subtle existential suffering born from misunderstanding the nature of the self—it deepens the reader's understanding of why life, even at its best, is marked by instability and unsatisfactoriness. This insight helps shift the reader's perspective from simply avoiding pain to recognizing the deeper layers of clinging and delusion that underlie all suffering. The emphasis on **impermanence**, **desire**, and the **interdependent nature of the self** reflects core Buddhist teachings with clarity. And by concluding with the **Noble Eightfold Path**, the paragraph wisely transitions from diagnosis to remedy, reminding us that the Dharma is ultimately about **practice**, not just knowledge.

(7) Wings to Awakening, Part III, the Basic Factors, by *Thanissaro Bhikkhu* (Geoffrey DeGraff), 2011

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The Four Noble Truth (another view from a Contemporary Scholar)

[…….]

"As for the imperatives implicit in the four categories of the noble truths, they are very different from the imperatives implicit in the notion that there is a self or that there isn't. Stress, the first

[57] http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/thanissaro/wings/part3.html .

category, should be comprehended. In practice, this means admitting its presence, recognizing it as a problem, and then observing it with patient mindfulness to understand its true nature. One comes to realize that the problem is not with the stress and discomfort of external conditions, but with the stress and discomfort in the mind. One also sees how stress is part of a causal process, and that it is always accompanied by craving, its point of origination.

The second category, craving, the origination of stress, should be abandoned. Here we must note that the word "craving" covers not all desire, but only the desire leading to further becoming. The desire to escape from that becoming, as we have noted [II/D], is part of the path. Without such a desire, no one would have the motivation to follow the path or reach Unbinding. When Unbinding is reached, though, even this desire is abandoned, just as a desire to walk to a park is abandoned on arriving there [§67].

The third category, the cessation of stress, should be realized. The definition of this truth as the abandoning of craving means that it denotes the successful performance of the duty appropriate to the second noble truth. This introduces a double tier into the practice, in that one must not only abandon craving but also realize what is happening and what is uncovered in the process of that abandoning. This, in turn, accounts for two of the major themes covered so far in this book: the switch from "object" (craving) to "approach" (abandoning) as the focal point in one's meditation as one moves from the first to the second stage in frames-of-reference meditation [II/B]; and the need for sensitivity to one's present input into the causal network in order to nurture the mind's skillful mastery of this/that conditionality [I/A]. The feedback loop created by this combination of abandoning and knowing is what eventually short-circuits the process of this/that conditionality, cutting dependent co-arising at the links of craving and ignorance, and leading on to the state of non-fashioning that forms the threshold to the Deathless.

The fourth category, the way to the cessation of stress, is defined as the noble eightfold path, which we have already discussed in detail [II/H]. This truth must be developed, which involves two processes: nurturing the conditions for clear knowing; and abstaining from acts of body, speech, and mind that involve craving and would obstruct knowledge. These two processes correspond to the two layers we have just noted in the duties associated with the cessation of stress: realizing and abandoning. This correspondence shows the intimate relation between the third and fourth noble truths, and explains the Buddha's insistence that the noble eightfold path is the only way to the goal."

[…..]

Comment: This is an insightful and mature reflection on the **imperatives** implicit in the Four Noble Truths. Rather than treating them as abstract doctrine, the passage skillfully frames them as **practical tasks**—to be comprehended, abandoned, realized, and developed. This echoes the traditional Theravāda understanding, particularly found in the Pāli Canon, where each truth is paired with its corresponding duty.

The first truth, **dukkha (stress, suffering),** is not merely to be acknowledged but *comprehended*. The emphasis on observing it **with patient mindfulness** brings out the heart of Buddhist meditative inquiry: turning the lens inward and recognizing that the problem lies not in external conditions, but in the **mind's reactive tendencies**. This points to the transformative potential of insight: seeing suffering not as an external punishment, but as a process rooted in misunderstanding and craving.

The discussion of the second truth, **craving,** is especially clarifying. By distinguishing between craving that leads to becoming and the wholesome **desire to escape suffering**, the

passage resolves a common confusion in early Buddhist texts. The idea that even the wholesome desire is eventually dropped—like a raft once the shore is reached—is both elegant and faithful to the spirit of the Buddha's teachings.

When it comes to the **cessation of stress**, the passage insightfully points out the *double aspect* of this realization: not only is craving abandoned, but one must also **know** what has been realized. This subtle point brings in the dynamic feedback loop of insight and action, rooted in dependent co-arising. It's a brilliant way of showing how **practice and understanding co-arise**—each deepening the other until even the habitual processes of craving and ignorance are cut off at the root.

Finally, the emphasis on the **Noble Eightfold Path** as something to be *developed*—in terms of nurturing clarity and refraining from unwholesome actions—reaffirms the practicality of the entire teaching. The connection between the third and fourth truths is clearly articulated: without developing the path, the cessation of suffering remains out of reach.

(8) The Nobility of the Truths, by *Bhikkhu Bodhi*, 1998[58]

How to cite this document (a suggested style): "The Nobility of the Truths", by *Bhikkhu Bodhi*. Access to Insight (BCBS Edition), 5 June 2010.

[…….]

"The first noble truth, the truth of suffering, is to be fully understood: the task it assigns us is that of full understanding. A hallmark of the noble ones is that they do not flow along thoughtlessly

[58] http://www.accesstoinsight.org/lib/authors/bodhi/bps-essay_20.html .

with the stream of life, but endeavor to comprehend existence from within, as honestly and thoroughly as possible. For us, too, it is necessary to reflect upon the nature of our life. We must attempt to fathom the deep significance of an existence bounded on one side by birth and on the other by death, and subject in between to all the types of suffering detailed by the Buddha in his discourses.

The second noble truth, of the origin or cause of suffering, implies the task of abandonment. A noble one is such because he has initiated the process of eliminating the defilements at the root of suffering, and we too, if we aspire to reach the plane of the noble ones, must be prepared to withstand the seductive lure of the defilements. While the eradication of craving can come only with the supramundane realizations, even in the mundane course of our daily life we can learn to restrain the coarser manifestation of defilements, and by keen self-observation can gradually loosen their grip upon our hearts.

The third noble truth, the cessation of suffering, implies the task of realization. Although Nibbana, the extinction of suffering, can only be personally realized by the noble ones, the confidence we place in the Dhamma as our guideline to life shows us what we should select as our final aspiration, as our ultimate ground of value. Once we have grasped the fact that all conditioned things in the world, being impermanent and insubstantial, can never give us total satisfaction, we can then lift our aim to the unconditioned element, Nibbana the Deathless, and make that aspiration the pole around which we order our everyday choices and concerns.

Finally, the fourth noble truth, the Noble Eightfold Path, assigns us the task of development. The noble ones have reached their status by developing the eightfold path, and while only the noble ones are assured of never deviating from the path, the Buddha's teaching

gives us the meticulous instructions that we need to tread the path culminating in the plane of the noble ones. This is the path that gives birth to vision, that gives birth to knowledge, that leads to higher comprehension, enlightenment and Nibbana, the crowning attainment of nobility."

Comment: This is a beautifully articulated and purpose-driven exploration of the Four Noble Truths, emphasizing the transformative tasks they invite us to undertake: understanding, abandoning, realizing, and developing. Each truth is not merely something to be known intellectually but something to be lived and practiced.

The first noble truth is rightly framed as a call to **deep inner reflection**. Rather than fleeing from the discomfort of life, the noble ones, those who walk the path with wisdom, turn inward to honestly examine the human condition. This inward gaze is not morbid or pessimistic, but courageous and liberating. The reminder to contemplate life's impermanence and our vulnerability to suffering is an invitation to wake up, to live more mindfully, and to search for a deeper freedom.

In addressing the second noble truth, the passage skillfully highlights that **craving is the fuel of suffering**, and that even before full enlightenment, we can begin to work with our defilements through ethical restraint and mindful self-awareness. This practical encouragement is crucial: it shows that the path begins **here and now**, not at some distant, idealized spiritual plateau.

The third truth, which speaks to cessation, is presented with both reverence and clarity. Nibbāna is described not just as a metaphysical goal, but as the ultimate value, a compass point for our lives. By seeing the insubstantial and impermanent nature of worldly things, we naturally

shift our aspiration toward the unconditioned. This is a powerful reminder that the Dhamma doesn't ask us to renounce joy, but to seek a joy that is **stable, unconditional, and free from clinging**.

Finally, the fourth noble truth is elevated as the engine of transformation. The Noble Eightfold Path is not just a set of moral guidelines, it is a systematic training of the heart, mind, and actions. The description of it as the source of vision, knowledge, and enlightenment shows the intimate connection between disciplined practice and profound realization.

(9) The range of suffering, from *Bhikkhu Bodhi*, the Noble Eightfold Path, the way to the end of suffering, first BPS Pariyatti Edition, 2000, p. 5.

"The Buddha does not merely touch the problem of suffering tangentially; he makes it, rather, the very cornerstone of his teaching. He starts the Four Noble Truths that sum up his message with the announcement that life is inseparably tied to something he called dukkha. The Pali word is often translated as suffering, but it means something deeper than pain and misery. It refers to basic unsatisfactoriness running through our lives, the lives of all but enlightened. Sometimes this unsatisfactoriness erupts into the open as sorrow, grief, disappointment, or despair; but usually it hovers at the edge of our awareness as a vague unlocalized sense that things are never quite perfect, never fully adequate to our expectations of what they should be."

[……]

Comment: This paragraph captures the **depth and subtlety** of the Buddha's teaching on *dukkha*. It moves beyond the narrow translation of the word as "suffering" and gestures toward its broader and more nuanced meaning: a pervasive sense of unsatisfactoriness that colors all conditioned experience. This is crucial, because many modern readers may assume that the

Buddha's focus on suffering is pessimistic or overly focused on obvious pain. But as the passage explains, *dukkha* is not only about overt sorrow, it's about the restlessness, incompleteness, and constant friction we feel in even our most "normal" or pleasant moments.

The image of *dukkha* "hovering at the edge of awareness" is especially insightful. It reflects how, even when things are going relatively well, there's often a quiet background sense that something is missing, that no pleasure or achievement fully satisfies, and no situation remains stable for long. This echoes the Buddha's deep psychological insight: the mind, driven by craving and clinging, is constantly grasping, never quite at peace.

What makes the Buddha's teaching powerful is that he does not dwell on this truth to evoke despair, but to point the way **toward liberation**. By confronting dukkha directly, not avoiding or suppressing it, we begin the path to understanding, release, and lasting freedom. As such, dukkha is not just the problem; it is also the doorway to insight and transformation.

(10) To see the truth, the teachings of *Venerable Pramote Pamojjo*[59]

[…….]

"The third Noble Truth, the end or cessation of suffering, is another thing that is often wrongly understood as death, or a place we go when we die. The truth of cessation is the liberation from suffering while we are alive. The body and mind are still suffering and changing about, but there

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[59] First Edition: May 2012, printed in Thailand, p. 64

is no attachment to these things. In enlightenment, when the body dies, it is not just a liberation from the suffering that still exists, but it is complete extinction of suffering.

The fourth Noble truth, the Eight-fold Path to the end of suffering, is also hard to understand. (Right view, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, right concentration). People think that these are eight different stages along a path. But actually, the path is like a spider with eight legs. Each leg makes up the path, but is not

the path. If we have mindfulness, all eight factors that makes up the path will develop appropriately.

[…….]

Comment: This passage does a good job of dispelling common misconceptions about both the cessation of suffering and the path leading to it. Many people, especially those new to Buddhist thought, may interpret the *Third Noble Truth*—the cessation of suffering—as something that only happens at death or in some remote, metaphysical realm. But the author wisely reminds us that cessation is not about escape from life, but freedom within life. Enlightenment, in this view, is not the absence of pain, change, or difficulty, but the absence of attachment and delusion—the very roots of suffering. This reframes liberation as something both profound and accessible, grounded in our present experience.

The explanation of the *Fourth Noble Truth*, the Eightfold Path, is also insightful. By likening the path to a spider with eight legs, the author challenges the misconception that the path is linear, like climbing steps in sequence. Instead, the image reinforces the idea that these eight factors, right view, right intention, and so on, support and interpenetrate one another. Just

as a spider needs all its legs to move with balance, so too must a practitioner cultivate all aspects of the path simultaneously and harmoniously, especially with **mindfulness** at the center.

This passage reminds us that the Dharma is not abstract philosophy, it is **lived wisdom**. Liberation is not waiting at the end of the road, but begins with each step taken mindfully and wisely in the here and now.

(11) The core concept of Secular Buddhism: The Four Tasks, Stephen Batchelor, May 2, 2022[60]

"Gotama, the man we call the Buddha, lived in the northeast of what is now India roughly between 480BCE and 400BCE. In his first teaching, he presented his listeners with 'a middle way' that avoided the religious dead ends of his time – mortification and indulgence. This path is based on his understanding of why human beings experience suffering and how we can stop suffering: what traditional Buddhists call the Four Noble Truths. The Four Noble Truths in traditional Buddhism are: 1) Life inevitably involves suffering; 2) Suffering is caused by craving; 3) We can be free of suffering if we stop craving; and 4) There is a way of thinking, acting, and meditating that leads to complete liberation from suffering. Based on his analysis of the relevant Pali texts and the line of interpretation developed by the English-born Buddhist monk Ñāṇavīra Thera in the 1960s, Stephen Batchelor has reinterpreted The Four Noble Truths as four tasks. Because these four tasks are so closely connected, we can also think of them as four aspects of one task or a fourfold task. For Batchelor, Gotama's teachings about dukkha are

[60] https://secularbuddhismnetwork.org/the-core-concpt-of-secular-buddhism-a-fourfold-task/

not truths to be believed, but injunctions to transform our lives and promote human flourishing in this world."

Comment: Stephen Batchelor's reinterpretation of the Four Noble Truths as the **Four Tasks** shifts the focus from believing in fixed "truths" to engaging in practical actions. This is central to **secular Buddhism**, which emphasizes lived experience, ethics, and psychological insight over metaphysical or doctrinal belief. This passage successfully introduces the reader to both the historical background of Gotama (the Buddha) and Stephen Batchelor's reinterpretation of the Four Noble Truths. It clearly frames the traditional understanding of the Four Noble Truths and explains the philosophical move Batchelor makes, from truths that must be believed to tasks that should be practiced. By mentioning Ñāṇavīra Thera, the passage also shows the intellectual lineage of Batchelor's thought, adding depth and credibility.

The strength of the passage lies in how it emphasizes 'the practical and transformative nature' of Batchelor's reinterpretation, stressing that the focus is on promoting human flourishing here and now, rather than adhering to fixed doctrines. This makes the Buddha's teaching accessible to secular audiences who may not relate to religious belief but are deeply interested in practical wisdom for living.

(12) The World of Tibetan Buddhism, An Overview of Its Philosophy and Practice, *Tenzin Gyatso the Fourteenth Dalai Lama,* Wisdom Publications, 1995. p.15.

The Four Noble Truths (another view from a Contemporary Scholar)

[……]

“In this Discourse, which because known as the first turning of the wheel of Dharma, the Buddha taught the principles of the Four Noble Truths are the truth of suffering, the truth of the origin of suffering, and the truth of the Path leading to this cessation.

According to the sutta concerning the first turning, when the Buddha taught the Four Noble Truths, he taught them within the context of three factors: the nature of the truth themselves, the specific functions, and their effects, or complete attainment.”

[……]

Comment: This paragraph skillfully underscores the profound method by which the Buddha presented the Four Noble Truths during the first turning of the Wheel of Dharma. It reminds us that the truths are not merely to be accepted intellectually, but to be deeply contemplated, practiced, and realized. By emphasizing the three aspects, understanding the nature of the truth, knowing its function, and accomplishing its fulfillment, the paragraph reflects the gradual and thorough way in which wisdom unfolds. It points to the heart of the Buddha’s path: a journey of insight, effort, and ultimate liberation.

Chapter 4: Case Studies: Practical Applications of Dharma

4.1 Ethical Living

The principles of Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood provide a moral compass for navigating complex ethical dilemmas in modern society. These three: Speech, action, and livelihood, protect your mind from remorse, create wholesome and harmonious environment around you, and prepare you for deeper insight. Without a strong ethical foundation, meditation can feel blocked or unstable and unhealthy. With Sila (ethical conduct) strong, meditation deepens naturally, and wisdom grows more easily and effectively.

4.2 Emotional Well-being

Mindfulness practices, such as meditation, help individuals cultivate awareness and equanimity, reducing stress and enhancing emotional resilience. Through meditation, a core practice in Dharma teachings that enhances emotional well-being, increases focus and mental stability, and the development of ethical and compassionate qualities.

4.3 Interpersonal Relationships

Compassion and understanding foster harmonious relationships, encouraging empathy and reducing conflict. In essence, Dharma teachings help cultivating compassion, loving-kindness and mutual understanding one another that we can build a good and strong relationship that contribute to our well-being and the well-being of others around us.

4.4 Coping with Change

The teaching of impermanence offers tools for accepting and adapting to life is inevitable transitions. Understanding and accepting the impermanence is a core principle in Buddhism, believed and practicing meditation to be a key to reducing suffering and achieving enlightenment

4.5 Mindfulness in the Workplace

This case study explores how mindfulness training programs have improved productivity and reduced stress in corporate settings. With mindfulness we can improve our decision-making in daily workplace and reducing stress when overloading with hard solving tasks.

4.6 Compassionate Leadership

Dharma teachings emphasize living in accordance with natural laws, which includes kindness, compassion, and acting ethically. Compassionate leadership, in turn, encourages leaders to act with empathy understanding their followers' needs and concerns. They strive to enhance the happiness and well-being of their people by supporting them and giving them what they need appropriately.

4.7 Personal Transformation

Stories of individuals who have embraced Dharma to overcome personal challenges and achieve a balanced life. These elements will be illustrated by the following case studies from Case Studies in Spiritual Care by George Fitchett and Steve Nolan, and one special case from my life experiences about my almost ten years' imprisonment in the Vietnamese communist prison.

4.8 First Case Study (from Assignment Paper in the Master class of Buddhist Philosophy, Sakya Buddha University)

Buddhist Spiritual Assessment for Luz

Background:

Clinical site: at the street, where a group of unhoused people gathering at night

Chaplain: Bach Vuong, Sakya Buddha University

Date and Length of Contract: unspecified, one conversation made with Luz that night (expected that she may need more support in future).

Careseeker: Luz

Age: 49

Religion: non-religious (previously grew up Catholic, but due to significant trauma through the church and no longer identifies as religious)

Ethnicity: un-specified (no information provided)

Gender: female

Relationship status: single (assumed, no information provided)

Occupation: a warehouse employee (but in a sick (back-injury) leave after two weeks working)

1. **Describe the nature of suffering (*dukkha*)**

As a chaplain at Sakya Buddha University, I provide counseling to a group of unhoused individuals. I take a walk to visit this group normally every week. One night, while approaching them, I greeted Clint, a younger man who sometimes prays with me. Then I introduced myself to Luz. I was not surprised that Luz reacted adversely: she looked up, sneered, and shouted at me to go away. Although Clint tried to calm her down, she still insisted "The last thing I need after a

day like today is a lesson from a priest." I assured her that I was not there to give lessons to anyone but simply to listen to her worries.

Despite my reassurance, Luz replied, "I don't talk to priests anymore. I stopped believing in God a long time ago." I responded: "That is fine by me. I am an interfaith minister, not a priest, and I serve people from all backgrounds, regardless of their beliefs." This revelation seemed to surprise her. She had never met a priest who was indifferent to whether those he supports believed in God. As a result, she became more open and began to share. It was what she truly needed at that moment.

A middle-aged woman with no house, no job, losing faith in God, having back injury and feeling of no hope in future

Luz, a forty-nine-year-old woman, is unhoused and has experienced a long series of suffering throughout her life. She used to be in Catholic religion but because of significant trauma happened with her in the church, she lost her faith in God for such a long time and did not talk to priests anymore. Seeking connection, she joined an unhoused group where she could talk and share her story and sadness.

On those days, Luz had faced numerous challenges. It had taken her months to find a job due to her lack of a permanent address. Just two weeks earlier, a friend of her friend had introduced her to an opportunity at a warehouse. Unfortunately, she experienced serious back pain the day before and was forced to take time off work. The origins of her pain can be traced back thirteen years, leading to a dependence on opioids prescribed by her doctor. After over ten years of substance use, she became alienated from her family, exhausted her financial resources, and damaged her employment and housing records, ultimately resulting in her current situation

of living on the streets. Luz felt defeated and was overwhelmed by fear, believing that no one could offer her a new opportunity.

2. **Determine the immediate causes (samudaya) of the suffering, using the three roots as guides:**

Luz finds herself trapped in the consequences of her own life, facing three karmic challenges related to her mind, speech, and actions. Beginning with a loss of faith and a disease that led to addiction, her responses have manifested as ignorance, attachment, and aversion. These factors all cumulated to pull her life into a downward spiral.

a. **Attachment (lobha/raga)**

Luz attached to her experience of a significant trauma with the church in the past, leading to her to cling to her judgement of priests. She fears experiencing suffering again and has distanced herself from the churches and priests. Her negative reaction to a priest who comes to help her is a defense mechanism, strongly rooted in her desire to protect herself from unpleasant feelings. Having lost her faith in God, Luz clings to the opinion that priests, as representatives of God, could potentially bring unhappiness back into her life.

Additionally, after many challenges and efforts, Luz has finally secured a job. In her opinion, she attached to a vision of job to be stayed with her and support her unstable life. She desired that she performed well to sustain this job. Unfortunately, her back injury has resurfaced, leaving her deeply disappointed.

Luz fears that she may lose this job, believing that no one will offer her another opportunity. Her fixation on the vision of instability has left her feeling frustrated and hopeless, exacerbating her misery.

b. Aversion (dosa/dveṣa)

Initially, when the chaplain arrived to assist Luz, she reacted with agitation as soon as she saw me in my priestly attire, shouting at me as her natural response. Her emotions were overwhelmed by the relentless misfortune or sadness she had been enduring, leading to her feeling of self-esteem. Her suffering stemmed not only from physical pain but, more significantly, from her worried mental state. Luz frequently expressed her aversion through feelings of frustration, defeat, anger, and anxiety.

c. Ignorance/Delusion (moha)

Luz fell into delusion due to of blind faith, which led to suffering in her spiritual beliefs and painful experiences with God, the church, and priests. Lacking the right view and actions in response to her negative religious experiences resulted in her long-time disappointment. Her reaction to a helpful priest illustrated her ignorance although it is understandable given her circumstances. Instead of seeking a constructive solution, she was inactively fettered by the health treatment, causing her addiction. This further reflected her lack of wise decision-making in dealing with her illness. Consequently, she endured both physical and mental health issues. As a result, all aspects of her life became worse and unrecoverable.

She formed a wrong view and narrow judgement of religion and priest, causing her lack of emotional intelligence to shout at the chaplain who genuinely wanted to help. She interpreted her situation through an egocentric and self-esteem lens, focusing on her own suffering and anger over her perceived misfortunes.

After being unemployed for a long time, she did her utmost to work despite her previous back injury. If she considered the appropriate hours and workload at a fair wage, it might be a wise decision for her to avoid confronting her difficult circumstances at this moment.

3. Discover what it would look to reduce suffering and, if possible, bring about joy (nirodha)

Among series of suffering, any glimmer of hope is treasured to alleviate Luz'ss suffering and burdens. Reflecting on her past struggle with back pain and addiction which led to her downward spiral, she has made right efforts to overcome her addiction and has no longer using drugs. Through her right view, right intention and right action, she made the necessary decisions to improve her life. This aligns with the Four Right Exertions in Buddhism: "(i) Make the right effort to prevent unwholesome actions from arising and (ii) Take the right effort to eliminate unwholesome actions that have arisen." (Wikipedia, 2023)

Though she has lost faith in God and the church, it seems Luz still believes in the importance of social relationships. She maintains connections with her friends and has joined various groups. Additionally, through her friends' support, Luz was offered a job which brought her joy amidst her ongoing struggles.

Ultimately, after enduring physical pain from her back injury and the mental stress of fearing job loss and instability, Luz managed to find the courage to have an open conversation with her boss to explore possible solutions regarding her situation. She has also received valuable support from a chaplain, who has provided her with renewed faith and possibly helped her reassess her previous misperception. I believe this guidance is illuminating a new path for her, as the chaplain understands the Four Noble Truths and is assisting her in finding relief from suffering through spiritual counseling.

4. Co-create a path (magga) to that place relying on

a. Words that encourage joy, consolation, or healing (sammā-vācā/samyag-vāc)

Luz's reaction to the challenges in her life indicates a lack of emotional intelligence, manifesting through unwholesome words and actions that negatively impact her well-being. It would be advantageous for her to open up her concerns and connect with the chaplain more frequently. This offers her the opportunity to transform the seeds of ignorance in her understanding of her own story into seeds of wisdom that allow her to see things as they truly are. By deeply contemplating seeds of her feelings including anger, fear, and disappointment with a clearer perspective, she can work to change these unwholesome seeds into seeds of peace and happiness, resulting in gentle words and kind actions. She may also want to embrace and practice the five precepts: refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, and using intoxicants. By doing so, she can encourage others to adopt these principles, avoiding negative outcomes and cultivating positive fruits.

b. Actions that relieve suffering and increase happiness (sammā-kammanta/samyak-karamānta)

Firstly, Luz should prioritize her physical and mental health. She needs support from her friends, family, and the community to help her recover from her back pain, and her commitment to following her treatment plan is crucial. It would also be beneficial for her to learn practical techniques to calm herself, enabling her to address issues with greater wisdom and less anxiety caused by her many worries. She could seek guidance from the chaplain to explore methods for

cultivating her inner strength, such as practicing breathing techniques, meditation, qigong, tai chi, or yoga, all of which can greatly enhance her physical and mental well-being.

Secondly, if she can understand that the root causes of suffering stem from the law of karma and the law of causes and conditions, it could provide her with deeper insight. Based on the analysis of the Four Right Exertions in Buddhism, it would be wise for her to continuously

focus on the two initial steps of preventing and eliminating unwholesome actions while also advancing to the next two steps: “Make the right effort to continuously nurture wholesome actions as they arise, and take the right effort to foster wholesome actions that have yet to emerge.”

c. A renewed sense of life purpose or meaning (sammā-ājīva/samyag-ājīva)

Luz is experiencing a nervous part in her life as she puts a tremendous amount of effort and hope into her new job. As she is so scary and really needs someone to guide her thoughts, provide clarity and make her more confident for any further actions. Spending more time with the chaplain, who has earned her trust and can provide valuable counseling, would greatly benefit her. Faith is a vital aspect of human life, helping her connect with others in her community and strengthening her spiritual insight and her brave. With guidance from the right person, she can regain her faith in life and explore any spiritual path that offers her peace and relief from suffering.

Additionally, Luz may want to consider reconnecting with her family to fill any emotional gaps. As Luz improves herself both physically and mentally, her family will notice her transformation and offer her greater support. Home will always be a comforting place for her to return to.

d. Supportive social networks and resources (sangha)

Social networks and resource support are clearly essential for Luz’s well-being. It is important for her to maintain active connections within her social network and invest in her friendships. When she recognizes how fortunate she is to have kind and supportive people around her, she will begin to trust both others and herself. This realization can empower her to cultivate peace and happiness not only for herself but also for her family and those around her.

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4.9 Second Case Study (from Assignment Paper in the Master class of Buddhist Philosophy, Sakya Buddha University)

Case Study: Healing or Hallucination

Clinical Site: A Large, Public Teaching Hospital in California.

Chaplain: Bach Vuong, Vietnamese American, cisgender man in his late 70's, who is the student of Master Buddhist Philosophy class at Sakya Buddha University.

Dates & Length of Contact: Almost make a brief visit daily. For the past year and a half as well as continued support multidisciplinary team.

Careseeker: Angie

Age: 25.

Religion: Christian.

Ethnicity: African – American.

Gender: cis-female.

Relationship Status: Currently single, heterosexual.

Occupation: Undergraduate student, work part time.

1. **Describe the nature of suffering (dukkha)**

Angie is twenty-five-year-old undergraduate student. She worked part time in customer service for Mc Donald fast food in Huntington Beach, California. She worked for Mc Donald about four years and a half ago. She enjoyed the job. All the co-workers liked the way she was doing there. Sometimes Angie felt isolate and lonely, a bit of stress from the work when customers were so crowded. Now and then she experienced some exasperation and dispute within her peers. She has just recovered from drug addiction. It seems that Angie does not get along with the people in her family, and with the people surrounding herself. She has a permit to return to Pentecostalism of her youth because of she has sustained sobriety. She might experience some emotional and cognitive dysregulation before diagnosis of cancer.

I first met Angie during an event at Sakya Buddha University. She appeared quiet and talked a little bit. She visited me at the office of Sakya Buddha University around one week later and has stopped by two weeks since then. I have created notes followed each conversation and has used them for this assessment. I also observe Angie's activities on campus. After this encounter she has been diagnosed with cancer – Advanced Hodgkin's Lymphoma cancer. And she has admitted to a large, teaching Hospital, in California and is waiting for a palliative care bed. And, she is expected to die during this hospitalization.

. From my first conversation with her. She speaks softly and with little facial effect, though she clearly means and usually uses emotional terms. She does not have the habit of making eye contact when speaking. Her monologues are not well organized, beating around the bush, vague, and now and then inconsistent. She answers questions sideways rather than directly. After about 35 minutes, Angie concentrated on anxiety because of a letter from one friend she

believes is in out of harmony and abusive relationship and her friend indicated an interest in visiting Angie. But Angie did not want to continue that relationship. But, because of lack of means of communication she could not relinquish the friendship.

In the palliative room, for more than a week, Angie could not sleep at night, and got a fever, fatigue. So, she was very weak, she has been unresponsive. I made several daily visits, but could not meet her in person. She received no other visitors, she barely has a friend (all walls are bare of cards, and there are no flowers in the room.) One morning after one week she has been unresponsive, she has rallied, and became responsive. I decide to check in with her, and she is open a visit to her. When I enter the room, the first thing I notice that all walls are bare of cards and there are no bouquets of flower in the room. She must be in a situation of feeling lonely and isolated. I thought to myself it is a great pity for her in this moment of her life. I feel so sorry for her, right this moment she needs the comfort from her family members and also from her friends, and none! But now, I have to say hello to her in order to begin my daily visit. Hi, Angie, how are you this morning? last night did you sleep well? she replies with weak voice “I am OK chaplain”, I continue my question, “how are your experiences so far in this room?” She starts to say: “It was just me and God dancing together up there in the corner. I had on a red dress. The prettiest red dress. I never wore nothing like it. We danced and danced. You know, people always say, “God is this” or “God is that”. God is not nothing we know about, even if he is a darned good dancer. It is just, “God is”. She continues, and there are tears in her eyes, not even, “God is” just, “IS”. (This reminds me of the quote of Buddha, “this is, because that is”, all is one and one is all – the Oneness.) Her experience with God at this time indicated that her family has undergone, sometime in the past, the problems regarding drug addiction, therefore, she felt disheartened. So, more than a week she kept silence and unresponsive, in the last moment she

looks for God to help her, by means of yogic meditation I think, and God has responded to her by dancing with her in her dream and so on…She felt so happy that tears coming down from her eyes. The blessing from God she received through dancing with God in the dream, that because after recovering from addition, she returned to Pentecostalism to practice reconciliation, love and to be loved, and sustained sobriety.

Angie did not state about her parents, sibling, family of origin, or her childhood. She does not appear to have any of a romantic partner and her sexual orientation is not known.

2. Determine the immediate causes of suffering.

A) Attachment

Angie studied social sciences during she attended college in California. She is clinging to her psychological knowledge, although her awareness seems intellectual and academic, in place of integrated. She connects her academic capabilities to her self-worth, especially to her dominance over the irritating classmate. Angie is attached to her assessments of other persons. She is attached to a volition that people should understand and value her, and needs to communicate with others and receive recognition for her academic and intellectual abilities. She is attached to the idea that nobody could help her in the final stage of cancer but the God.

B) Aversion

She is alienated from her family and distances herself from people that gave bad influences to her cancer diagnosis and earlier recovering from addiction. Angie is also very averse to words or actions from others that she considers as proof of low thought of her. To put it another way, she wants to be treated as somebody special. Lack of the desire degree of attention, concern, and patient from others makes her feel ashamed and anger. These emotions can become an ego-

centric interpretation of the behavior of others, leading to a prevalent fear for her own worth and value. She averses the multidisciplinary team due to give her drug-induced hallucination, no benefit for cancer treatment.

B) Ignorance/Delusion

Angie considers she is a Christian, but she never identified herself as affiliating to any social community, friend group, or club which make me to believe she might have an academic and distinctive understanding of other people. In the absence of supportive social ties, her views of others have to develop into confused, as conflicts between academic theories mix. At the same time, her academic understanding can be used to form narrow judgements of others, based on limited interactions. She was blind to believe in her study of psychological pathology and does not take the full complicate of human nature into account. That impact on the outcomes, good or bad, either onto herself or onto others, or transfers all the blames to others for their failure to follow the rules and treat her accordingly.

3. Joy

In addition to words, action, livelihood, and relationships, Buddhism offers concrete guidance in the form of antidotes to the three poisons of attachment, aversion, and ignorance. In Angie's case, ignorance appears to be the strongest root of suffering, as it enhances her attachment and aversion. The antidotes for ignorance are calmness, equanimity, in this situation she is so weak because sleepless at night, and fever and fatigue, I myself as her chaplain can show her how to practice breathing, nine rounds of breathing. And I can transfer universal energy to her in order she can feel better, less fatigue, even fever. (I have practiced a meditation that can receive the universal energy from the universe for 9 years so far. Then I can transfer that energy to heal disease of others, by using two hands). In this case of Angie, I can transfer the universal energy

that I receive from the universe through meditation to reduce her fatigue even her fever. And she will feel better until she dies.

4. **Path.**

In this case of Angie, she has been admitted in a palliative room and expected to die during this hospitalization. She found a specific strength and hope in God's provision of care and her confidence in God's ability to give her the comfort, meaning and purpose. I recommend Angie to pray for patience and peace by asking for understanding and compassion for all of the care providers, especially those working her case. She has to practice forgiveness, loving-kindness for all of her family members and friends, and let it go all the suffering, attachment, and aversion. Because life is emptiness and impermanence. Prayer is a way for Angie to re-center herself and find peace and God's presence in the midst of her worry and anxious waiting. Our prayer together is both a request for God's presence to be known and experienced, and an attempt to reframe Angie perception toward others before she passes away. As a chaplain, I encourage Angie to pray every day, practicing forgiveness, and compassion more and more, and doing penance of all her mistakes and sins (if any), in order finally she will die in peace and happiness, and then going up to Heaven soon.

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4.10 Third Case Study (from my life experience)

Case Study: Healing from trauma

Concentration camp in Vitnam: A Large Re-education camp in Vietnam

Chaplain: My life**,** Bach Vuong, Vietnamese, cisgender man in his late 31's, who is the professor of the National Center of Technology at Phu Tho District, Vietnam.

Dates & Length in prison: Almost ten years.

Age: 31

Religion: Buddhism.

Ethnicity: Vietnamese

Gender: cis-male.

Relationship Status: married.

Occupation: Professor.

1. **Describe the nature of suffering (dukkha)**

On April, 1975, the communist from the North of Vietnam invaded the South of Vietnam took over the Saigon city. They bring misery from the North to the South, and ship all the resources in the South to the North. They have forced hundreds of thousands of the soldiers and officials of previous regime into prison including religious leaders and employees of the Americans or the old government. Caused a diaspora of boat people to escape over the sea (by wooden boats were often not seaworthy, were packed with people like sardines, and lacked sufficient food and

water. Many were caught or shot at by the Vietnamese coast guards, and many perished at sea due to boats sinking, capsizing in storms, starvation and thirst. Another major threat was the pirates in the Gulf of Thailand, who viciously robbed, raped, and murdered the boat people. In many cases they massacred the whole boat. Sometimes the women were raped for days before being sold into prostitution…). An estimate of a million or so, and the United Nations High Commission for refugee has said around half of that amount died at sea. At the time, I still was teaching civil engineering at National Center of Technology, I thought to myself, I cannot stand this situation, so my friend also teaching at the center and I joined a group of Intellectuals headed by Dr. Nguyen-D- Que he was graduated in France then in US. He returned Vietnam and was the director of Cho Ray Hospital in Saigon city. We stood against (non-violence) the communist in Saigon city. The purpose of our protest is to make a signal to the next Vietnamese generation that Communism and socialism are not acceptable by our people and our country. The communist doctrine that carried out by the current regime brings nothing good to the people but the misery and suffering. All the living of the people has been turned upside down.

The communist government, the Socialist Republic of Vietnam has implemented a Stalinist dictatorship of the proletariat in the South as they had done in the North. The security apparatus network (Công- An: literally "Public Security", a communist term for the security apparatus) controlled every aspect of people's lives, which has impacted on every activity of the people from the newborn babies up to the old people almost died, and even the death their tombs have been demolished and the land was occupied by the government using that land for its own purpose. All the basic freedom has been suppressed, religions have been restricted or canceled by re-organized into state-controlled churches or temples. Education using brain-washed technique - Marxist-Leninist style to teach students. Standing before that situation, I could not enjoy my

position as professor at the Civil Engineering College of National Center of Technology at Phu Tho. I think I have to do something to share the suffering that our people have been undergoing. So, my colleagues and myself organized a group of Intellectuals headed by Dr. ND Que to protest against the government…

I was thirty- one-year-old at the time, and I was teaching full time at the Civil Engineering College that belongs to the National Center of Technology at Phu Tho District, Saigon city. I worked here for 6 years and a half until the date I was arrested by the communist polices (Công- An: Public Security), in November, 1976 after 9 months of activity (and they put me in prison for almost 10 years). First, they detained me at a residence that they confiscated, and three guys who beat, kicked, and punched me and they continued it for at least 15 minutes; fortunately, no internal injury was found later. From here I was transferred to different prisons and concentration camps with different harsh internal regulations, but they all have the same purpose that is trying to brain-washed every single inmate. The life in the concentration camps was very terrible, foods and rice that provided by the camp are meager, they feed the inmates just enough to breath not for hard labor work as required by the camp. The labor was mostly hard physical work, some of it very dangerous, such as mine field sweeping. No technical equipment was provided for this work, and as a result, many prisoners were killed or wounded in mine field explosions. Other work included cutting trees, planting corn and root crops, clearing the jungle, digging wells, latrines and garbage pits, and constructing barracks within the camp. With these hard labor work, the foods for the inmates provided by the camp authority are never enough to keep the inmates continued to survive and perform their hard labor work at the camp as required by the camp headquarter. Deaths from starvation and disease occurred frequently and bodies were often buried in graves on site which were later abandoned. The work was done in the hot

tropical sun, by prisoners who were poorly nourished and received little or no medical care. The poor health, combined with hard work, mandatory confessions and political indoctrination, made life very difficult and contributed to a high death rate. The prisoners have undergone the constant hunger that resulted from a lack of food while they were in the camps. The lack of food caused severe malnutrition for some prisoners and weakened their resistance to various diseases. Most common among the diseases were malaria, beriberi and dysentery, Tuberculosis was also widespread in some of the camps. The inmates should need medicine and supplement food (main nutrition for the inmates) from their immediate family.

In the year of 1980, official regulations stated that prisoners in the camps could be visited by their immediate family once every three months. Family visits not only meant personal contact, but also it meant they could bring food to their relatives. We, the prisoners in these camps would not have survived without such food. The duration of these visits lasted from 15 to 30 minutes. Family visits could be suspended for prisoners who broke rules. Only families who proved their loyalty to the government were allowed visiting privileges.

There was an incident happened in the hard labor camp at Ham Tan Thuan Hai, Z30D-coastal province in South of Vietnam (where I am in); because we the inmates of the camp could not stand the ill-treatment and inhuman behavior from the warden (jailers, Cán-Bộ). For examples: (1) The inmates try to pick some vegetable growing alongside the road leading to the working field to improve the food for the dinner. The guards intercepted and pressed their heads into the right place where the inmate just picking the vegetable (this continues day after day), (2) When inmates were disciplined for some violation, such as criticize the office services not as indicated in the policy of the head quarter of camp, the period of time announced 2 weeks for the disciplined inmates who were put in solitary location, but the isolated confinement time

continued sometimes one year or more, and we cannot complain. (3) The visit time with inmates' families was cut arbitrarily not as scheduled (like my case the visit time lasts just 10 minutes or so, because I am the element being noticed), (4) Beating inmates occurred oftentimes, all these events accumulated year after year. Thus, all the inmates (including me) concur unanimously that we must do something in order to improve the actual situation. So, on the late of 1981, an uprising was started by all the parts of the camp, K1, K2, K3.

I was in the collective house #8 of the camp, (housing about 30 inmates or so) where one inmate named N D Toan headed this house and guided us how to proceed this uprising in sync together with other houses. We decided not to receive the food provided by the camp, and also denied to go to work in the field. Toan prepared a Claim: (1) request the warden (the head) of the camp stop beating the inmates under any circumstances. (2) The camp must observe the human rights for the inmates (right of breathing, right of eating enough to survive…), (3) The visit time of inmates with their family must be respected, (4) The isolated confinement time for the disciplined inmates should not extend arbitrarily.

The manager of the camp called on us, "ask us to be calm and he will respond all the requests later. But right now, all of you must obey the rules of the camp that stop the protest and resume going to work in the field and continued to receive the meals from the camp". But we still continued our fight until day 2, all the food we saved has gone so we must agree with the camp manager to stop the protest and resume normal activity of the camp (This fight, the BBC station have announced our uprising). 2 weeks later, 28 inmates (including me) were transferred to Chi Hoa prison (big prison in Saigon city) again. (One thing I have to state here that our uprising is unique in the history of detaining the prisoners of the Vietnamese communist regime. And because of our fight against the camp authority, around 2 to 3 years later the activities of the

inmates in the camp Z.30D at Ham Tan Thuan Hai are comfortable and improved, the visit time between inmates and their family is at least 30 minutes, duration for putting disciplined inmates in isolated location is observed as indicated in the notification paper. And no more beating inmates…).

This time they detained us in the area reserved for death sentence prisoners. One in each cell. At this prison the main things that they wanted to exploit is, who else is behind the protest? And the confession from us, but their scheme failed… Our food from family provided exhausted. The meals feed us here was very meager, one small bowl of rice mixed with corn and the food was salted water very diluted (not enough salt), so we lack of salt in our body and we feel thirsty of 'salty' stuff and hungry all the time. Of course, we are very weak and thin. We ask for some salt they never gave us.

There was one story very interesting as follows, the system of toilet at Chi Hoa prison is very good, toilet drain pipes are one continuous piece from 3rd story through the bottom floor that led to septic tank. Never get stuck. So, one day ND Toan (the head of the uprising) is in the story above me, he used a string tied the food including a bite of sweet rice and a very little salt all was wrapped in plastic bag, I received this 'gift' through **the hole of the toilet**. And when I tasted it, a grain of salt, the salty substance permeated through my body and I can feel the sweetness (sweet rice) and salty stuff running through each internal organ of my body so healthily like a special good energy runs through my body. And **just a bite of sweet rice** with a very little of salt, yet, **it is so tasty** (and incredible) **that until now in the US, I cannot find that taste again!** this circumstance (lacking of food) lasts for more than one year or so. At this moment we can realize that the spiritual factor determines our surviving for the rest of duration in Chi Hoa prison.

When our body fell into nutrients deficiency our organism reacts differently. I could not sleep at night, from 6pm, I was awake until 4-5 am, this situation lasts until I was allowed to receive food supplies from family. Then we were transferred to the last camp in central of VN--Phu Khanh A20. Here is the concentration camp of detaining all the prisoners with different background 'extremely dangerous to the society', that is the notorious name of this hard labor camp.

At the beginning before we arrived. The inmates had not enough food to eat, they have to eat grasshoppers (flying shrimp) and even the flies, the first time they try eating the flies they wrapped them in guava leaves then eat, later because guava leaves are hard to find and they eat flies alone. This valley is very hard to arrive, from outside to this location people have to pass by a low area, in dry season this area become dry but in rainy season the rain water fill it up, so people could not pass by, and no one can reach the camp. That's why in rainy season the inmates were hungry, and hungry, and hungry all the time.

Here the head of the camp devised a method of punishing the prisoners when they violate the regulations of the camp, as follows: they are put in a cell 1.5mx 2.20mx2.5m (5'x7'-4"x8'-4") with one vent 8"x8" above the top of the door. 2 feet were shackled and the shackles tied to one iron bar from outside inserted into the cell. I was put in this cell for minor violation of internal regulation of the camp. but luckily just only one long night. Any inmate put in the cell must 'enjoy' each meal, 3 spoons of rice with salted water mixed with rice, and also 3 spoons of water (the water is taken directly from the well no boiling), so the thirst of water was a very big problem to the prisoners. That is why, when the inmates go for the interrogation by the warden of the camp, they drink to the full and when they get back to the cell, pee for the other to drink

that urine. I have a friend named, V H Cuong, a lawyer he was put in this cell for 6 months, fortunately he was still alive.

The weather in central of VN was very severe, in summer it was very, very hot and in winter it was chilly to the bone, the inmates in the cell just having the clothes on, and no blankets were provided. Imagine, the body missing foods and lacking of water day after day. So, the consequence: the inmates got sick and had disease, the common disease is dysentery. The camp has no medicine for curing dysentery disease, that causes deaths. Their bodies were buried in graves on site in the field and later abandoned.

There are so many things to remember, and I have undergone all kind of persecution, repression, indoctrination and savagery at each prison and concentration camp (the so-called re-education camp). What I have described for this thesis regarding the suffering that I have experienced through almost ten years in the communist prison is just a tip of the iceberg as compared of the suffering which the communist government has imposed on all other inmates around the country. I thought to myself, based on the law of causality, that I have to pay my karmic actions from previous life. Therefore, all these days in the prison I felt somehow relaxed and content with what I have passed through. I did not hate the communist government, because the ignorance covered all the actions that they have carried out. Instead, I feel a kind of pity on them because they did not know the consequences of their actions. They did not have any idea about the past, present, and future.

2. Determine the immediate causes of suffering.

A) Attachment,

I am originally a teacher of the civil engineering college. So, the hard labor work in the concentration camp as hoeing soil under the scorching sun in Phu Khanh, the central province in

Vietnam and deep in jungle valley or at any place in concentration camp is very difficult for me to adapt. But by contemplation over time, I thought to myself, there are other millions of people who also have experienced the same suffering sometimes surpassed my suffering a lot. Then, I feel relaxed. Another feeling is that being apart from the society a long time which creates missing the food, missing relatives and family, missing everything in the situation lacking of all necessary things **even the air to breath**. The attachment of basic need of life is common, the attachment of teaching is the same; especially the attachment of food is regular, because we are hungry all the time in the camp at Phu Khanh. In prison, I always contemplate my doing in all the camps and also in the prisons that I have passed through; I think of other's suffering, it is so tremendous and incredible, and then all my attachment has diminished sometimes it disappeared.

B) **Aversion,**

I was living with the Vietnamese communists since I was about five- year- old in the area occupied by the Viet Minh (League for the Independence of Vietnam), the life of the people at the time was terrible miserable (1949-1950), then my family has fled to the region under the governing of emperor Bảo Đại (the last king of the Nguyễn dynasty), therefore the aversion of the communist started in my mind through manas since then. I lived in the North of Vietnam, Hanoi city (1949-1954). In 1954, after the Geneva Accords has been signed by the French and the Viet Cong. Vietnam was divided into two parts: the North of Vietnam (communist), and the South of Vitnam (free-world). My family has experienced living with the communist government, no freedom but misery. Therefore, my family one more time has moved from Hanoi city to Saigon city (South of Vietnam) under the government of emperor of Bảo Đại, belonging to the free world (1954-1975).

On April, 1975 the communist from the North of Vietnam invaded the South of Vietnam, took over the Saigon city. All the half country of Vietnam—South of Vietnam felt into chaos, misery and immensely suffering. People could not bear the ruling of the communist, everyone hated the communists and found the way to escape the country by boat, or by foot despite the extreme dangerous happening to them even the death and so on…Myself after being relieved from the prison in late 1985, I fled Saigon city in 1990 to Belgium as a visitor. And then, take refuge in the US as a political refugee. I reunite with my family after 15 years of separation.

C) Ignorance/Illusion.

Entering at the age of 31, still young and vigorous, but I cannot stand the situation, environment around me full of inequality and oppression happening day after day, my conscience pushed me to volunteer protesting against the occupied force. To share with others the suffering. Today, when studying the dharma teaching, the non-duality, in summary the concept that emphasizes the fundamental oneness and interconnectedness of all things, suggesting that reality is a seamless and unified whole. Our protesting against the communist government is a reminder to the communists (the occupiers) that they have to unite all the people as a whole, because we have the same blood stream, the Vietnamese one. Of course they did not listen to, and put us into the prison. At that time, I did not really understand the **non-duality concept**, and also non-self and transcendence of view, but as an intellectual in the education branch of the country at the turmoil circumstance. I could not sit idle in front of the aggressors no matter what. If I am in their position I will do otherwise, and all the soldiers and officers of the previous government will still be in their old positions. And I carried out the reconciliation for the whole country. Bringing the happiness to mankind and the interconnectedness—inter-

being concept and transcendence of view are realized and established in practice. No need killing anyone, and both sides are happy.

D) Joy

I was arrested in 1976, and imprisoned for almost 10 years, I have sacrificed my youth and left behind my family. I have tasted every level or style of physical and spiritual suffering. And I thought to myself that I have seen and experienced **the 'hell' in the present time**, later on when I return to normal life, I will feel everywhere seems to be Eden to me. But I never harbor enmity towards the communists. I feel relaxed almost the time in prison and it seems to me that I have some mission in the prison. There were many times young men (young inmates) came over me and talked about their scheme to escape, when I pondered on it, that is impossible, and I prevented them not doing so. Or another case, an individual, he wanted to strike another inmate because that inmate is an 'antenna' (slang stands for inmates who live with us and report all our activities in the camp to the camp manager), I also recommended him, not being foolish to do that. With communists individual protesting, they suppress easily and very cruelly. In prison, I have learned a lot of things, good and bad, as I met all kind of people. By the law of cause and effect, I feel happy for paying my karmic actions in previous life despite I volunteered to join the movement of protesting against the communist government. That thinking is the right view or right understanding of the **Noble Eightfold Path**. The most of all is that I have saved many young inmates with charisma from involving trouble and being disciplined in isolation place which is very horrible.

E) Path

Buddhism has traditionally focused on nurturing the enlightened qualities of the inner mind as a way to reduce suffering and conflict. Negative emotions, such as hatred, can be diminished and transformed into positive forces like compassion and loving-kindness. Similarly, the qualities of love and compassion can be nourished and strengthened. A Buddhist practitioner is encouraged to look inward to develop inner harmony and cultivate virtues such as wisdom, generosity, and devotion. Through varying levels of understanding, individuals have used Buddhist principles to find answers to life's fundamental questions and to contribute meaningfully to society and the broader world. The foundation of this approach lies in the Five Precepts (*Panchasheela*), with the very first urging followers to refrain from harming any sentient beings, making non-violence a core tenet of the Buddhist path. This principle is essential for resolving conflicts constructively. In Buddhism, violence is broadly understood as any intentional act meant to harm or endanger others. The Noble Eightfold Path further emphasizes this in the fourth step, Right Conduct, where the Buddha calls for the cessation of violence. *Ahimsa*, or non-violence, is firmly embedded in Buddhist teachings. Practicing non-violence in thought, speech, and action means committing to avoid harm, deceit, and aggression. Ultimately, causing harm to others is seen as harming oneself. Thus, through its emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and peace, Buddhism offers a powerful framework for resolving conflict and promoting harmony.

I have absorbed Dharma teachings, the essential principles of the Noble Eightfold path, and followed the practice of mindfulness meditation which help me out of trauma of almost ten years under the horrible conditions of imprisonment in the Vietnamese communist prisons; that is the crucial points that how I could write this thesis complete.

Chapter 5. Conclusion

5.1 Summary of Findings

This thesis demonstrates that the teachings of the Buddha offer timeless wisdom applicable to various aspects of daily life. By embracing these teachings, individuals can cultivate inner peace, ethical conduct, and meaningful relationships.

In summary, the Dharma teachings serve as a timeless guide for those seeking clarity, peace, and liberation from suffering. Rooted in **The Four Noble Truths**, the teachings illuminate both the nature of our difficulties and the path to their end. **The Noble Eightfold Path** offers a balanced and holistic framework for living, a way to cultivate ethical behavior, mental discipline, and profound insight. Through practicing mindfulness, understanding impermanence, and letting go of attachment to self and desire, we begin to experience a shift in how we relate to the world and ourselves. The Dharma does not ask for blind belief but encourages direct experience and inner transformation.

Ultimately, the heart of the Dharma is compassion and wisdom. It points us toward a life of greater awareness, kindness, and freedom, a path not only to personal liberation but also to contributing to the well-being of all sentient beings.

In addition to the above thinkings, by research and analyzing we have some more **Findings:**

5.1.1 Traditional Foundations of Dharma Teaching

5.1.1a. Definition and Meaning of Dharma In classical Indian philosophy and particularly in Buddhism, *Dharma* (Pāli: *Dhamma*) holds central significance. It signifies the truth, the Buddha's teachings, and the universal law that governs all existence. Dharma embodies

the path that leads to freedom from suffering and is one of the Three Jewels in which Buddhists seek refuge: the Buddha (the historical enlightened teacher), the Dharma (which includes the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path), and the Sangha (the community of Buddhist practitioners).

5.1.1b. The Four Noble Truths, A core principle of the Dharma is the Four Noble Truths, which provide the essential framework for comprehending the nature of suffering and the way to overcome it.

- **Dukkha**: Life inevitably includes suffering, discomfort, and unease
- **Samudaya**: Suffering arises due to causes—primarily craving and attachment.
- **Nirodha**: It is possible to bring suffering to an end.
- **Magga**: There is a path that leads to the cessation — the *Eightfold Path*.

5.1.1c. The Noble Eightfold Path This path outlines ethical conduct, mental discipline, and wisdom:

- **Right View and Right Intention** (Wisdom)
- **Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood** (Ethical Conduct)
- **Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration** (Mental Discipline)

These elements are interdependent and cyclical, cultivating mindfulness and insight.

5.1.1d. Three Marks of Existence Dharma also emphasizes the nature of existence through:

- **Anicca** (Impermanence)

- **Dukkha** (Suffering)
- **Anatta** (No-self)

Recognizing these characteristics helps practitioners develop wisdom and detachment, leading to freedom from suffering.

5.1.2 Contemporary Interpretations and Applications

5.1.2a. Dharma in Daily Life: Modern teachers emphasize applying Dharma not just in meditation, but in everyday actions and choices. Mindfulness of speech, compassion in relationships, ethical work, and inner awareness are seen as living embodiments of the Dharma.

5.1.2.b. Secular Dharma and Interfaith Approaches: In recent decades, a secular approach to Dharma has emerged, especially in the West. Teachers like Stephen Batchelor advocate for a pragmatic interpretation of Dharma — as a philosophy for living rather than a religion. Dharma is also being integrated into interfaith dialogues, where its universal principles of compassion, impermanence, and mindfulness resonate with other traditions.

5.1.2c. Science and Dharma: The rise of interest in mindfulness and meditation, backed by neuroscience, has brought Dharma teachings into clinical and therapeutic settings. Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) and related practices draw directly from Buddhist Dharma while framing them in secular terms. Scientific studies validate the efficacy of meditation on mental health, attention, and emotional regulation.

5.1.2d. Challenges and Opportunities: While Dharma is spreading globally, it also faces challenges:

- Cultural Translation: Balancing authenticity with accessibility.
- Commercialization: Preserving depth in a world of quick-fix mindfulness.
- Community: Reimagining Sangha (spiritual community) in online spaces and diverse societies.

Conclusion: Dharma teachings remain timeless and adaptive. Rooted in the profound insights of the Buddha, they continue to evolve as they encounter new cultures, disciplines, and individual needs. Whether practiced in a monastic context or integrated into modern life, Dharma offers a path of clarity, compassion, and liberation.

5.1.3 The Transformative Power of Dharma Practice

5.1.3a. Personal Transformation Through Dharma: Dharma practice is not merely theoretical; it deeply impacts practitioners' lives. Regular engagement with Dharma teachings fosters emotional resilience, equanimity, and a more compassionate worldview. Many practitioners report increased self-awareness, a sense of inner peace, and a diminished attachment to materialism and ego-driven desires.

5.1.3b. Dharma and Social Engagement: Engaged Buddhism, a term popularized by Thich Nhat Hanh, emphasizes that Dharma practice also extends to social and environmental concerns. Practicing Dharma in this context includes compassionate action in society, ethical activism, and mindful responses to injustice. It encourages applying Buddhist ethics to issues like poverty, war, climate change, and inequality.

5.1.3c. Teaching and Transmission of Dharma: Traditionally, Dharma was transmitted orally and later through texts and formal teachings. Today, Dharma is shared via books, podcasts,

online courses, and social media. While this broadens access, it also challenges the depth of transmission and the need for qualified teachers who can guide students responsibly.

5.1.3d. Global Impact and Cultural Adaptation: The Dharma is taking root globally, with Sangha and retreat centers found across continents. Cultural adaptation allows Dharma to resonate with diverse audiences, though care must be taken to preserve its integrity. For instance, rituals and symbols may evolve while core principles, compassion, wisdom, mindfulness, remain constant.

Final Thoughts: As individuals and communities engage with Dharma, it becomes a living tradition, offering a roadmap not just for personal liberation but also for collective healing. Whether in silence on the cushion or in action in the world, Dharma continues to illuminate the way toward deeper understanding and lasting peace.

5.1.4 Ethical Foundations and Future Directions of Dharma

5.1.4a. The Five Precepts and Ethical Living: A key component of Dharma practice is observing ethical principles, such as the Five Precepts:[61]

- "Abstaining from killing living beings
- Abstaining from taking what is not given
- Abstaining from sexual misconduct
- Abstaining from false speech
- Abstaining from intoxicants that cloud the mind"

[61] The Five Precepts are outlined in various discourses, including the Sigalovada Sutta (Ñāṇamoli & Bodhi, 2001)

These guidelines promote moral integrity and serve as a foundation for meditative and wisdom practices.

5.1.4b. The Role of Compassion and Loving-kindness (Metta): The cultivation of Metta (loving-kindness) and Karuna (compassion) is central to Dharma. These qualities counteract anger, fear, and selfishness, fostering inner peace and harmonious relationships. Metta meditation is a popular method for nurturing unconditional goodwill toward oneself and others.

5.1.4c. Dharma and the Youth: Engaging younger generations in Dharma practice is vital for its continuity. Youth programs in monasteries, schools, and online communities are making teachings accessible through storytelling, digital media, and interactive learning. This encourages early ethical development and emotional resilience.

5.1.4d. The Future of Dharma in a Changing World: As the world faces rapid change, from technological advances to environmental crises, the Dharma offers timeless guidance. Its emphasis on mindfulness, compassion, and interdependence equips individuals and societies to respond wisely and ethically. Continued adaptation and transmission through modern platforms ensure the Dharma remains relevant and impactful.

Closing Finding: Dharma is not a static doctrine but a living, breathing path of practice. Its ethical foundation, contemplative depth, and transformative potential offer a powerful antidote to the confusion and suffering of modern life. As we walk the path of Dharma—The Eightfold Path, we participate in an ongoing tradition that nurtures awakening and peace for all beings.

5.2 Answers to Research Questions:

1) How can individuals apply the Dharma in everyday decision-making?

This was answered through the three case studies given in this project in Chapter 4.

2) How does mindfulness enhance emotional intelligence and mental clarity?

Mindfulness allows for direct perception of the Three Marks of Existence, impermanence, suffering, and non-self. This clarity undermines ignorance, the root of suffering.

Mindfulness cultivates emotional intelligence by fostering non-reactive awareness**,** compassion, and insight into feelings. It develops 'mental clarity' by purifying the mind of distractions and delusions, allowing for 'direct insight' into reality and ultimately supporting liberation.

3) What role does Buddhist ethics play in fostering compassionate communication and ethical leadership?

Buddhist ethics play a foundational role in fostering compassionate communication and ethical leadership, both in Dharma teaching and in broader applications of Buddhist practice. These ethics are grounded primarily in the **Five Precepts** (mentioned above), the **Noble Eightfold Path** (mentioned earlier in chapter 2), particularly *Right Speech*, *Right Action*, and *Right Livelihood,* and the cultivation of compassion (karuṇā) and loving-kindness (mettā)**.**

In sum, Buddhist ethics form both the **moral compass** and **method** by which compassionate communication and ethical leadership arise naturally from the path of practice.

5.3 Implications

The practical application of Dharma can contribute to societal well-being by promoting mindfulness, compassion, and ethical living. In essence, the dharma in Buddhism is both the path and the goal. It's the method of practice recommended by the Buddha (e.g., the four

noble truths, the eightfold path), the realization of enlightenment, and the very nature or reality. When we deeply understands and lives in accordance with the dharma, they are said to be living in harmony with the way things truly are, leading to liberation from suffering.

5.4 Limitations

The Dharma, or the teachings of the Buddha, is often described as timeless, universal, and liberating. But there *are* some limitations, depending on how you look at it. Here are a few key types of limitations we talk about:

5.4.1. Limitations in Communication

The Dharma has to be transmitted through language and culture, which can distort its meaning. Teachings that resonated in ancient India might need reinterpretation in modern contexts.

Without proper guidance, it's easy to misinterpret teachings like "non-self" or "emptiness" in ways that are intellectually interesting but not personally transformative. People can use spiritual ideas to avoid difficult emotional work. For example, misusing “non-attachment” to suppress feelings, or “emptiness” to avoid responsibility.

5.4.2. Limitations in the Practitioner

The Dharma works when the listener is ready. If someone isn’t open, or is too caught in defilements (like greed, hatred, and delusion), the teachings might not take root.

The Dharma isn't magic, it’s a path. It requires personal effort, discipline, and patience. There's no shortcut to insight.

Liberation isn't instant. It requires mindfulness, ethical conduct, concentration, and wisdom. The Dharma points the way, but each person must walk the path themselves.

5.4.3. Limitations in Context

Modern life can make Dharma practice harder. The Eightfold Path is easier to follow in supportive conditions (like monastic life or a spiritual community).

Struggling for survival can make it hard to meditate or reflect deeply on suffering and liberation.

Balancing Dharma practice with jobs, family, and responsibilities takes a different kind of wisdom than monastic life. Teachings may need adaptation to modern living.

5.4.4. Limitations in Interpretation

Ironically, people can turn the Dharma into dogma, clinging to views, rituals, or labels, which is the very thing the Buddha warned against. Over time, religious institutions can dilute or modify the original intent of the teachings for political or cultural reasons. The Buddha warned not to cling to the teachings themselves. He compared them to a raft: useful to cross the river, but unnecessary to carry once you've crossed.

That said, the Buddha taught that the Dharma is like a raft: it's meant to be used to cross the river of suffering, not to be carried around once you’ve crossed.[62]

[62] Alagaddupama Sutta (MN 22) in the Majjhima Nikaya of the Pali Canon

5.5 Future Research

Further studies could explore the integration of Buddhist principles into education, healthcare, and governance for broader societal impact.

Future research in Dharma teachings, especially when approached with integrity and wisdom, can both preserve ancient traditions and make them more accessible and relevant for modern life. Here are some meaningful directions for future research in Dharma teachings:

5.5.1. Neuroscience & Meditation

- **What:** Studying how meditation affects the brain (neuroplasticity, emotional regulation, attention).
- **Why:** It helps bridge Dharma and science, increasing understanding and acceptance in secular and clinical contexts.
- **Example:** Research on how mindfulness practice alters the default mode network or reduces amygdala activity in response to stress.

5.5.2. Comparative Dharma Studies

- **What:** Comparing early Buddhist texts (Pali Canon, Agamas) and various traditions (Theravāda, Mahāyāna, Vajrayāna).
- **Why:** To clarify what is universal versus culturally specific, deepening the core understanding of the Dharma.
- **Example:** Exploring how the Eightfold Path is understood and practiced across traditions.

5.5.3. Socially Engaged Buddhism

- **What:** Applying Dharma principles to issues like climate change, social justice, prison reform, and racial equity.
- **Why:** Demonstrates the relevance of the Dharma in addressing suffering on a collective level.
- **Example:** Researching how Buddhist communities engage in activism and compassionate action.

5.5.4. Secular Dharma & Adaptation

- **What:** Investigating how Dharma teachings are adapted in secular contexts (like MBSR or ACT) without losing depth.
- **Why:** Ensures integrity while making teachings accessible to non-religious practitioners.
- **Example:** Studying the effects of secularized Eightfold Path programs in schools or workplaces.

5.5.5. Ethics, AI, and Dharma

- **What:** Exploring Dharma-informed perspectives on ethics in technology, AI, and digital life.
- **Why:** These are growing sources of suffering and confusion, and ancient wisdom can guide modern dilemmas.
- **Example:** Applying the Five Precepts or Right Livelihood to algorithmic decision-making or tech development.

5.5.6. Dharma and Environmental Sustainability

- **What:** Researching how Dharma-based values foster sustainable living and ecological awareness.
- **Why:** Climate change is a key cause of suffering today; Dharma teachings on interdependence and compassion are deeply relevant.
- **Example:** Buddhist eco-villages or monastic approaches to sustainability.

5.5.7. Trauma-Informed Dharma

- **What:** Integrating trauma-sensitive approaches into meditation and Dharma instruction.
- **Why:** Many practitioners carry trauma, and traditional methods need adaptation to avoid re-traumatization.
- **Example:** Adapting mindfulness practices to safely support healing from PTSD.

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